

Explorations of Gender Identity

A Study of Masculinity and Gender Predicaments in Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*

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Introduction

The male-centered prose of American contemporary novelist Cormac McCarthy has engendered a heated debate amongst scholars and critics. Nell Sullivan, for example, claims that his work has misogynistic leanings and that it “contain[s] feminine power and obviate[s] women” (252). Kenneth Lincoln diplomatically declares that: “McCarthy’s portraits of men are less than politically correct ...” (3). But not every critic agrees. Mary McGilcris reads *The Border Trilogy* as a critical rewriting of Western masculine stereotypes part of an overall critique of American mythologization (195). I propose to rethink McCarthy’s gender politics as a critique of masculine hegemony and look at how his texts invite a queer reading. By drawing on insights from queer theory, it is possible to understand McCarthy’s texts as exploring male subjectivity and destabilizing gender identity. The thesis will also stress the importance of the father and mother figures and try to examine the symbolic implication of the “lost mother” in McCarthy’s novel *Suttree* (1979). The trope of the lost mother is a recurrent aspect in his works, from *Child of God* (1973), to *All the Pretty Horses* (1992) and *The Road* (2006). This element invites a psychoanalytical approach which is why I will investigate whether Melanie Klein’s theories on the mother-child dyad can shed light on McCarthy’s depiction of mother-son relationship.

Suttree is McCarthy’s fourth novel and marks the last work of what has been called his Southern or Appalachian period. Following *Suttree*, he wrote four consecutive Western or revisionist Western novels, among them arguably his most commercially hailed work, *All the Pretty Horses*. *Suttree*, his only urban novel, is set in the city of Knoxville, Tennessee in the early 1950s—an era before the Civil Rights Movement and Women’s Liberation Movement had gained direct political influences. Thus, the novel depicts a less egalitarian society marked

by social discrimination and stigmatization.¹ The text explores these oppressive aspects of American culture and depicts black people, women and gay identities as victimized and harassed. Ab Jones, the protagonist's black friend, is regularly beaten by the police and has chosen to take a violent stance against oppression, and women are domesticated and subdued in the family institution. The text takes an oppositional stance to the conservative ideals and norms of the time and conveys feelings of sympathy and identification with the marginalized. The narrative as a whole describes how Cornelius Suttree has to shed the ideology of his upbringing in a middle-class, Catholic family and undergoes a transformation where he is able to embrace every soul and every "sinner" who has been shut out of the larger community. McCarthy taps into the subcultural identities of America and depicts an alternative community with individuals who, despite their exclusion from society, lead worthy lives. However, the text refrains from romanticizing lower-class life and the reader is frequently confronted with negative aspects such as prostitution, violence and severe deprivation. Still, as the protagonist acknowledges, it is a space "rich with vitality" (McCarthy 309) which he prefers to the structured and anesthetized bourgeois life. *Suttree* is an anti-establishment statement with which McCarthy warns of the moralizing and prejudiced "Pharisees" of 1950s America.

Although the novel has an episodic structure, it is for the most part narrated chronologically, beginning with Cornelius Suttree who has moved into a houseboat on the Tennessee River after having left his wife and child and broken off all contact with his parents. Gradually, the reader is granted insight into a plethora of his personal problems. McCarthy emphasizes the protagonist's childhood which frequently surfaces through fantasies, dreams and recollections presented in a cryptic and opaque fashion. Decoding the

¹ Note that in the period of the novel, practicing homosexuality illegal by law in the United States.

meaning of these fantasies becomes pivotal to understanding the narrative itself, which is heavily symbolic. An important stylistic aspect of the novel is McCarthy's use of free indirect discourse—a technique which embeds the main character into the third-person narration. In an extensive and thorough argument, Dianne Luce notes that "... Suttree's and the narrator's voice simultaneously invest one another or coexist, one in palimpsest under the other—are in fact twins or different manifestations of the same narrative consciousness ..." (205). She concludes that both the prologue and the epilogue can be read as the voice of the protagonist himself (217). Luce's insight makes it clear that comprehending the novel as a whole hinges upon a proper understanding of the main character and his motivations. Thus, Suttree's identity, psychology and selfhood are pivotal elements which must be comprehended in order to unlock the enigmatic narrative—Suttree is the very axis of the text.

This thesis argues that the main dramatic trope of the novel is the triangular relationship between the protagonist and his parents. McCarthy sets up an oedipal structure where Suttree's identification lies with the mother instead of the father. He challenges the oedipal scenario by subverting Freud's "idealized mother" who, in the theory of the Oedipus complex, is merely a passive object (Sprengnether 230). Instead, he portrays her as a complex individual embodying both benevolent and malevolent aspects—of which the latter is often described as phallic. An oedipal reading based on Freud would focus on the father-son relationship, thus leaving the mother as an unanswered riddle. Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical theories, on the other hand, focus on the pre-Oedipal mother-child bond and therefore seem to better grasp the textual complexities at hand. Moreover, the text's portrayal of the mother's body in both grotesque and beautiful fashion seems to warrant a Kleinian reading because her object-relations theory concerns how the mother's body is often a site of both sadistic and benevolent impulses. McCarthy employs uncanny imagery where female genitals threaten to swallow or castrate Suttree. This, I argue, is a metaphor for the gender

instability latent in the main character, because identification with the mother poses a fear of losing his masculinity.

The mother's lower-class background seems to imply that she becomes a prime mover for his interest in the marginalized. Suttree moves into the realm of the mother, the slums of Knoxville, in order to find his identity. His mother is symbolically named Grace, which indicates that she is the only salvation for the protagonist. McCarthy posits an alternative cosmology where the father-God is questioned and replaced by the androgynous Mother She, a double of his mother. With her concoctions, Mother She gives Suttree insight into his sexuality and gender identity which enables him to transgress the fear of homosexuality and his anxieties of mother castration. The father, on the other hand, becomes a symbol of gender conformity and the hegemonic structures of both society and the psyche. He mentally persecutes the protagonist, threatening his autonomy. He represents the voices which want to oppress and condemn, and is a manifestation of the Law—the law of the society which ensures racism, sexism and homophobia.

Before analyzing the text, it is necessary to examine how queer theory problematizes the binary sexed concepts. Instead of falling into the epistemological fallacy of using sexed concepts such as “man” and “woman” as identity markers, queer theory revealed the inherent essentialism of such subdivisions. Queer theory emphasizes the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities, avoiding concepts such as “patriarchy,” which suggests the ruling of men over women, and instead looked at how norms regulate and create polarized gender identities. Queer theory destabilizes the gendered subject, and, Judith Butler in particular argues how gender can be thought of as governed by performativity—as practices repeated and reproduced through culture. Following Butler's insights, Connell's Gramscian approach makes it possible to look at how male subjects are governed by norms of conduct as well as

reveal the hierarchies of masculine identities. The implication of several *masculinities*, opens up for a critical way of investigating the text's different masculine subjectivities.

The thesis opens with a theoretical chapter, and the three remaining chapters are patterned on the triangular shape of the family drama. The very title of the novel warrants such a structure, being the family name of the Suttree household—a solidification of the trope of names and identity which plays an important part in the text. Moreover, the name is the paternal last name, suggesting the protagonist's father's looming role. Thus, the second chapter involves the father figure and how he represents the hegemonic masculinity of the time the novel is set in. I discuss how he haunts the main character as the embodiment of the gendered norm he is supposed to follow, as well as argue how McCarthy's dismantling of the male deity-figure of the Catholic Church is a critique of its phallogentric philosophy. Discussed in the third chapter are the negotiations of identity depicted in the meeting with the subcultural space of Knoxville and the relevance of the transgendered character Trippin Through The Dew. I argue that the protagonist undergoes a transformation where he overcomes his fear of homosexuality and that the novel expresses aspects of queer time and space. In Chapter Four, the mother-character is examined by using the psychoanalytical concepts of Melanie Klein. Her object-relations theory is helpful in understanding McCarthy's focus on female body parts. Thus, the oscillation between the female body as gruesome and beautiful is a strategy to express the protagonist's ambivalent relationship to his mother. The reuniting with the mother becomes a moment of redemption and symbolizes the protagonist's successful rejection of his father and the impinging norms of society. McCarthy stages a gender transformation where Suttree adopts female attributes and is returned to his mother's womb.

Suttree is a rich text that remains elusive even in its conclusion: "A critical problem in reading the novel is the formative principle or logic of the conclusion ... the resolution—if it

is resolution—is given only a minimum of space, represented primarily by a few hallucinatory dream states elusive in imagery and implication” (Jarrett 59). While some critics have focused on gnostic and existential issues in *Suttree*, I propose that reading the text from a gender perspective is crucial in order to grasp its full complexities. My contention is that not enough has been said about McCarthy’s work in terms of gender. The analysis of *Suttree* will show that the author’s critique of androcentrism and hegemonic masculinities indicate that his writing is not misogynistic. Moreover, by highlighting his strategy of gender blurring, I suggest that his work should be reassessed as a challenge to essentialist assumptions of gender.

Chapter One: The Predicaments of Masculinity

In order to examine the concepts of masculinity it is necessary to address what lies beyond the concept of gender identity and how it differs from the similar concept of sexed identity. These are often confused, especially in the hegemonic ideology of Western culture. Sexed identity implies a correlation between biological sex and identity as the subject's identity appears to be embedded in two sexed alternatives, the male and the female. Although this may seem unproblematic, it leads to imprecise binary assumptions of gender. It proposes a "mind/body dualism," a furthering of biological essentialism which in its reductiveness excludes marginalized identities (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 16). The mind/body dualism implies that identity is "grounded" by biology. The concept of gender, on the other hand, allows for a wide range of identities which are not based on biology but on culture. "...[M]asculinity and femininity are not predetermined by the body itself, but are constructed within culture" (Warhol and Price Herndl XI). Judith Butler points out that the concept of gender "intersects with racial, class, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities" (*Gender Trouble* 4). The pre-cultural utopia implied by the biologically rooted concept of sexed identity must therefore be discarded in favor of the more inclusive concept of gender. Gender situates the subject firmly within culture and ideology as it is "...impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 4, 5). *Suttree's* focus on sexuality, gender anxiety and the conformist norms of society seems to warrant a gendered reading which this thesis argues is crucial in order to understand the novel as a whole. There are some aspects which invite closer examination. How are we to interpret McCarthy's homosocial renderings and the ensuing textual lack of women? Also, how are we to read his portrayals of women that are often accused of being misogynistic (Sullivan 252)? I will explore Cormac McCarthy's novel through a gender lens, using concepts that negate essentialism and subsume

the complexities of gender identity. My readings will focus on how gender operates psychologically, socially and politically. In order to highlight the different types of masculinity, I propose to use the term in the plural. Thus, masculinities are placed within a hierarchy where some are more legitimized than others.

The Fallacy of Sexed Categories of Identity

There is always a danger of solidifying stereotypes and essentialist assumptions when writing about gender. Even in academia, certain studies of gender use conceptual frameworks that perpetuate stereotypes and confuse the biological and the cultural. Positivist social studies, for example, use masculine/feminine schemas with the assumption that men are inherently masculine and women feminine (Connell 69). Such studies often end up, as R.W. Connell notes, predefining what they are supposed to find out (69). They fail to appropriate a proper critical approach to gender and instead reinforce cultural prejudices. Not only do such studies exclude and ignore different types of practices which go against the norm, but they also grossly simplify gender and gender identity. The danger of equating masculinity with maleness is that it creates essentialist assumptions of gender and ends up in imprecise dichotomies. Men are not simply masculine and women feminine. Masculinity is culturally and socially perceived as an embodiment of maleness even though both sexes inhabit masculine and feminine qualities. Pierre Bourdieu addresses similar concerns:

it is not uncommon for ... psychologists to take over the common vision of the sexes as radically separate sets, without intersections, and to ignore the degree [of] *overlap* between the distributions of male and female performances and the differences (of magnitude) between the differences observed in various domains (from sexual anatomy to intelligence). (3)

Bourdieu's use of the word "performance," suggests that gender is based on doing. Our sexed bodies dictate what is expected of us and what norms we are supposed to follow, but often this does not correlate with gender identity.

Drawing on Michel Foucault's insights, the feminist movement proved crucial in the development of critical work on gender as it sought out to assess the cultural discourse on gender. From the 1960s onwards, feminism(s) renegotiated cultural and hegemonic assumptions of gender, subverting and challenging old paradigms. But some of the central theories of feminism were accused of perpetuating essentialism in its adherence to sexed identity. Its political drive was based on "woman" as a stable and monolithic category of selfhood and identity. Instead, it implicitly favored white, Western women because "... the gender category 'women' places centre stage those women for whom race/ethnic/imperialism and class appear irrelevant" (Beasley 98). Sylvia Walby points out some of the conceptual problems feminism has had to rework:

not only is there no unity to the category of 'woman,' but ... analyses based on a dichotomy between 'women' and 'men' necessarily suffer from essentialism. Instead, there are considered to be a number of overlapping, cross-cutting discourses of femininities and masculinities which are historically and culturally variable. (15)

In other words, "women" and "men" are not unified concepts of identity. Each contains a range of different classes, races and ideological alignments. This presented a theoretical challenge for feminists as much of their work dealt with the subjugation of women by men. However, by using gender as an approach, it can be argued that power struggle is not simply between men and women, but between the masculine and the feminine. Pierre Bourdieu

pursues this view in his book *Masculine Domination* by using an ethnographic approach which historicizes masculinity and its hegemony in Western culture. Bourdieu argues how the masculine, or that which has been termed masculine, has taken dominion over the way we think and speak. I find it necessary to quote Bourdieu at length:

The work of symbolic construction ... is brought about and culminates in a profound and durable transformation of bodies (and minds) ... in and through a process of practical construction imposing a *differentiated definition* of the legitimate uses of the body, in particular sexual ones, which tends to exclude from the universe of the feasible and thinkable everything that marks membership of the other gender, and in particular all the potentialities biologically implied in the 'polymorphous perversity', as Freud puts it, of every infant to produce the social artefact [sic] of the manly man or the womanly woman. (23)

Normativity and symbolic construction create seemingly stable gender roles, legitimizing only the "correct" traits a subject is supposed to have as a member of a certain sex. However, Bourdieu posits a dichotomy between masculinity and femininity without taking into consideration how certain masculinities subordinate other practices of masculinities. There can be perceived a normativity principle within masculinity, favoring certain practices to others. The regulatory power of heteronormativity is addressed by the post-structuralist philosopher Judith Butler.

In 1990, Butler published her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble*. Her main thesis is that gender is *performative*; it is "a performance that is *repeated*" (*Gender Trouble* 191), yet which does not suggest a conscious or a deliberate acting out of gender: "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with

performance” (Butler, *Bodies* 95). Butler’s theory accounts for all the divergent gendered identities not fully expressed by terms such as “man” and “woman,” as well as it highlights the underlying political and cultural norms which create these narrow identities. It is in principle a socialization theory of how we acquire gender through repetition. As Todd Reeser notes, gender identity is constructed upon fluxes of masculinity and femininity (45). We do not experience, as men or women, to be either masculine or feminine in a stable way. Instead our identities are situational. Butler’s theory offers a critical tool as to how to investigate gender and gendered identity because it questions the very stability and core of being gendered. Identity is not an inner solid foundation but is upheld by doing. Thus, queer theory reveals how norms are imposed on subjects and how they dictate gender behavior. For Butler, *drag* is subversive because it displays the body as a site subjected to norms. I propose that McCarthy’s emphasis on the transgendered character Trippin Through The Dew as well as his strategy of staging a symbolical gender transformation are aspects which challenge the notion of gender as a coherent essence and can be read as subversive elements. But McCarthy also stages an Oedipal drama to depict the gendered conflict of his protagonist, to which we now turn.

A Psychoanalytic Approach to Gender

Butler argues that Freud’s theory is concerned with the “acquisition of gender identity” (*Gender Trouble*, 79) and reveals its underlying heterosexual norms: The son is to identify with the father and desire the mother. Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree* plays on Freud’s triangular structure. The eponymous character is supposed to be like his father but instead identifies with the mother. This is manifested in fantasies in which an evil mother haunts him threatening him with castration—a metaphor for his fear of losing his masculine identity. The text portrays how the father is repudiated by the protagonist who desires to return to a pre-Oedipal

space with the mother. In order to understand the pre-Oedipal mother, Melanie Klein has developed important concepts which help us to understand the psychological distress that the separation from the mother triggers. Klein's theory is particularly pertinent as it is based on the bond between mother and infant, which diminishes the importance of the father whose role feminists have criticized as being exaggerated. Therefore, it can be argued that Klein posits a more complete picture of the Oedipus complex by examining the role of the mother, rethinking the passive role Freud gave her. The mother is thus reinstated into the formation of sexuality and gender.

"The analysis of very young children has taught me that there is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object-relations are at the centre of emotional life" (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* 53). From birth, infants are attached to objects, a notion that Klein developed in debate with Freud's theory of an objectless early stage (Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* 58). Objects are to be understood as psychologically created elements, projected and introjected by a subject (Laplanche and Pontalis 188). According to Klein, this occurs as early as in the pre-oedipal infant stage with the maternal breast. The breast becomes a good object (as when it offers the infant milk) and a bad one (when the infant is denied gratification).² In the part-object—the breast—lies the ambivalence which later can be transposed to the whole object of the mother. In *Suttree*, Cornelius Suttree's conflicted relationship with his mother is clearly emphasized by his split view of the breast. Suttree experiences pleasant breasts but also dead breasts which reflect his ambivalence towards his mother. Implemented in Klein's theory is Freud's concept of the *death drive* and how the anxiety of abandonment by the mother is projected

² It is important to note that Klein distinguishes between part-object, for example the breast, which plays an important role in the early infant stage, and whole objects which are present in the adult stage, as for example the mother.

onto objects: “It is through ‘the depressive position’³ that we can maintain a sufficiently stable and satisfying relationship with the object” (Kristeva, *Melanie Klein* 73). The depressive position is a state where “He [the subject] remembers that he has loved, and indeed still loves his mother, but feels that he has devoured her or destroyed her so that she is no longer available in the external world” (Segal 70). *Suttree* can thus be read as a narrative of depression, mourning and loss. Implied is a forced separation from the mother stemming from gender socialization within a heteronormative culture.

Klein focuses on how infants, children and adults project and introject their paternal figures into objects, creating imagos—idealized “imaginary sets” or a “stereotype through which ... the subject views the other person” (Laplanche and Pontalis 211). *Suttree* has ambivalent feelings towards his mother, which makes him unable to interact with her. She is lost to him in the external world and is only present psychologically as an imago—a constructed image of both good and bad, life and death. Klein’s theory brings out important aspects of the novel, shedding light on issues that are crucial for McCarthy’s (pre)oedipal drama. However, there are theoretical issues that need to be addressed and resolved before accepting Klein’s theory. Feminists have been critical of object relations theory, arguing that it “highlights sexual difference, which, in turn, lend themselves to essentialist formulations” (Sprengnether 6). The advantage of Klein’s theory is that it is preoccupied with the pre-oedipal phase highlighting the binary relationship between mother and infant, thus diminishing the father’s previously hegemonic role. Therefore, it offers a more complete and accurate version of the Oedipus complex. The father becomes relegated to the background of what one may call a “pre-patriarchal space,” although some criticize this as utopian (Elizabeth Wright 347). But as this thesis argues, *Suttree* is about shedding the ideology of the father and

³ This can be understood as a trauma of loss and mourning; the infant’s loss of the mother.

return to the mother—a utopian depiction. The pre-oedipal theory highlights sexual difference in its focus on part-objects, but it does not seem to imply that gender identity is based on sexual differences as all children relate to the mother's breast. It is also rooted in anxiety, highlighting the predicaments of identity. This leads us to what Sprengnether identifies as an ego based on loss: "Like the plaster casts of the victims of Pompeii, the ego bodies forth an image of wholeness while attesting to an inner absence" (229). Thus the Oedipal structure by the inclusion of the mother becomes less rigid, reinstating the aspects of loss and how identification with the mother is by a male subject is denied by cultural norms. Having looked at psychological gender norms, it is necessary to look at how cultural values and ideals expected of male subjects can be addressed.

Towards a theory of masculinity

"A culture which does not treat women and men as bearers of polarized character types, at least in principle, does not have a concept of masculinity in the sense of modern European/American culture" (Connell 68). This claim suggests that, culturally, masculinity is inherently more associated with men than with women. The Western cultural norm demands that men inhabit and perform masculinity. Is masculinity, then, a concept that will solidify gender essentialism?

If gender is performative, and masculine/feminine traits are present in all individuals, then why use the concepts at all? John MacInnes criticizes the term, claiming that it is nonexistent and derives from a confusion of sexual genesis and sexual difference (2). Further, he argues that the concept is empty since it does not relate to empirical observations as identity is unstable. MacInnes claims that the term propagates patriarchy since it cements the notion of difference between sexes (25). However, Judith Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity* (1998), for example, argues that masculinity is

not only reserved for men and, thereby, also involves women. D.H.J. Morgan asks rhetorically: “How is it possible to use the labels ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ without falling into some kind of essentialism ... without in some way perpetuat[ing] the very stereotypes that a feminist inspired study seeks to undermine?” (qtd. in MacInnes 64). My response would be that masculinity and femininity are important concepts which highlight the attributes society demands of us as male or female subjects and what kinds of gender norms lead to power. The conflict of identity occurs when the subject is confronted by the incongruity between his learnt behavior (or performance of gender) and, as Freud would have it, his id—the subject’s realization that his instinctual drives do not correspond to his supposed gender identity.

MacInnes is categorical in his dismissal of the concept of gender. In his view, “gender, in the sense of an actually existing identity or social characteristics of men or women, *does not exist*” (2). For MacInnes, women and men are inherently the same which is why it is futile to try to separate them by using the concept of gender. However, identity is psychological and cultural. Seen in this way, gender does and must exist.⁴ There are gendered roles ascribed to us from birth since our bodies signal what we “should” be like. MacInnes’ underlying assumptions do not hold as they are strictly utopian and ignore socialization practices. Gender and gender identity are not biological facts, but cultural constructs. The question is: how do we talk about something that is felt and imposed as a cultural norm without perpetuating and subscribing to the very norm we criticize? There seem to be two options: One is to discard the concepts altogether and create neologisms, another is to rethink them. Masculine and male are related through language, which may be unfortunate, but the problem of creating

⁴ MacInnes’ claim also falls short in explaining practices such as sex-change operations and transgenderism. In such instances, the concept of gender seems crucial to be able to critically explore the issues of identity.

neologisms is that they become ahistorical and therefore would mask the normative aspects which demand that men should be masculine and women feminine. Any new concepts that remove all sexed connotations would not detect the power structures which uphold a sexed understanding of identity. I propose to subvert and challenge the concept. Thus, masculinity, as I have defined it, functions both as a non-essentialist concept as well as it reveals the preferable gendered behavior expected of males by Western culture.

Patriarchy and the Reinvestigation of McCarthy's Gender Politics

Any critical inquiry into gender and identity needs to address the politics of race and class. It is important to keep in mind how politics and power recreate certain notions of masculinity and femininity. R.W. Connell creates a rough overview of different masculinities which include hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity is "... the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answers to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell 77). Hegemonic masculinity may be seen as a culturally accepted masculinity which fits into the system of power and the state. Certain types of masculinities are thus politically and culturally encouraged and become heteronormative. John MacInnes, who does not support Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, claims that the category corresponds to stereotypical depictions of masculinity, although he admits that Connell does not attempt to accurately define it (14). He implicitly accuses Connell of avoiding an empirical definition because it would reveal stereotypical assumptions of gender and masculinity which, in MacInnes view, are pure constructs. MacInnes also points out that women may also inhabit hegemonic

masculinity and uses former British Prime Minister Margareth Thatcher as an example. MacInnes has a point. Is it too easy to assume that women are denied access to hegemonic masculinity?

I suspect that Connell avoids providing any definite examples of hegemonic masculinity because he is aware of its historical and cultural relativity. In order for his concepts to be universal and sustainable over time, he must avoid defining the specific features of hegemonic masculinity since it is always changing. The main function of Connell's categories is to reveal ideological power struggles and how society favors certain types of gendered behavior and disqualifies others. A proper understanding of this power struggle leads us ultimately to the concept of patriarchy. Instead of defining patriarchy as a state in which men subordinate women, as men of different and delegitimized masculinities are also subordinated, it can be defined as an ideological favoring of hegemonic masculinity—a type of behavior expected by men which enables social power.

Where does this bring us in understanding McCarthy from a gender perspective? Scholars of McCarthy have been hesitant to write about gender, and the few who have done so seem to use polemical strategies. Nell Sullivan's essay on gender in the *Border Trilogy*, ignores the subversive aspects of McCarthy's gendered individuals. She argues that the trilogy "destabiliz[es] ... gender identity" but concludes that "... while male performance of the feminine seemingly undermines the notion of 'natural' male domination, it also becomes one more strategy to contain feminine power and obviate women" (Sullivan 252). The fallacy lies in Sullivan reserving the notion of the feminine for women and the masculine for men. Instead of trying to find out why McCarthy excludes women, the critic can never get past the fact that he does so.

Sullivan is right in her observation that women are often gone from McCarthy's fiction, but she curiously contradicts the title of her essay *Boys Will Be Boys, Girls Will Be Gone* when she states that: "the 'gender trouble' in the Border Trilogy is that biological males—'boys' ultimately perform both gender roles to create a closed system of desire that effectively makes women unnecessary" (233). Thus, men *are not* simply men in McCarthy's world. By symbolically becoming female, they blur sexed concepts and reveal the fluidity of gender. The gender aspect of McCarthy's work has to be explored without the essentialist fallacies of sexed identities and rather by their relation to hegemonic assumptions of gender. I argue that *Suttree* must be read as self-reflexive depiction of what it means to live within patriarchy and the ensuing psychological problems in breaking with it. In this sense, the lack of women seems to play on trope of the lost mother which often occurs in the author's work. McCarthy's men are on a search for a renewed identity where they try to discard the oppressive father and reconnect with the lost feminine.

Chapter Two: Fathers—and the Flight from Hegemonic Masculinity

Father-and-son relationships are prominent throughout Cormac McCarthy's literary oeuvre. His debut novel, *The Orchard Keeper* (1965), concerns John Wesley Ratner who sets out to revenge the murder of his father, whereas his latest work, *The Road* (2006), is an intimate and tender exploration of the father-and-son relation in a harsh post-apocalyptic world. But none of his novels takes on as critical a view of fathers as *Suttree* (1979), where the father is an authoritative figure as well as a symbol of an oppressive and conformist society. The protagonist's father is a lawyer of a southern aristocratic background, the ruler of the Suttree household and a representative of hegemonic masculinity—a masculinity that entails social and economic power. He stands for the old patriarchal structures of society which subdue women as well as the marginalized of Knoxville. In a dialogue with his maternal uncle, Suttree decries his father's treatment of his mother, who was born into the lower classes: "John, she's a housekeeper. He has no real belief even in her goodness ... He probably believes that only his benevolent guidance kept her out of the whorehouse" (McCarthy 22, 23).⁵ The view is extended to society at large when he adds bitterly: "The women are just carriers" (23). He laments the treatment of his mother and how she is discriminated by a society governed by men. Suttree's self-inflicted lower-class status reflects his sympathy and identification with her. As a lawyer, the father represents The Law—the rules and regulations—whose aim is to secure gender conformity and obedience.

The paternal influence also operates on a psychological level. The father-figure haunts him, creating an identity conflict which McCarthy highlights with the trope of a split self. Suttree has unwillingly inherited his misogynistic leanings which have alienated him from his mother and render him unable to connect with women. He desperately tries to discard his

⁵ Note that throughout this thesis, the original syntax from the novel is kept even when it breaks with grammatical rules.

father's all-encompassing influence: first, by symbolically helping a friend bury his father in the Tennessee River, and finally by rejecting Catholic ideology governed by what McCarthy describes as a patriarchal deity. The text presents a conjoining of father, state and church, revealing the inherent androcentric ideology of society at large.

The Disobedient Son

The escape from the father and middle-class lifestyle symbolizes Suttree's rejection of hegemonic masculinity—a culturally promoted masculinity which involves hard work and striving for success, being a breadwinner, a family man, and one who produces and actively engages in shaping society. Implemented in American culture through capitalism, hegemonic masculinity is driven by what Connell calls “gender motivation” (172), which demand that men be socialized into power. The church, the family and the judiciary are institutions that secure such socialization into “correct” gendered subjects. These gendered norms also involve women who, according to the values of the time the novel is set, should marry, be financially supported by their husbands, and lead a domesticated life raising children.

Early in the novel, his father writes a letter condemning Suttree's lifestyle: “The world is run by those willing to take the responsibility for the running of it. If it is life that you feel you are missing I can tell you where to find it. In the law courts, in business, in government. There is nothing occurring in the streets. *Nothing but a dumbshow composed of the helpless and the impotent*” (15, emphasis added). From the last sentence it becomes clear that his father thinks him less a man, an impotent man, for leading a lower-class lifestyle. The father's overtly gendered discourse suggests the importance of sexual potency, alluding to the phallus as a symbol of power. Suttree projects his father's remarks upon the lower-class men of McAnally, perceiving “A thin little man ... squatting by the window masturbating. He did not take his eyes from Suttree nor did he cease pulling at his limp and wattled cock. It was deadly

cold in the room” (214). Impotence thus refers to the dreaded implication of being “unmanly” and is a trope for death and bodily decay.

The protagonist struggles with his father’s opinion concerning lower classes and with his own self-image as a lesser man. Thus, the novel dramatizes the forceful mechanisms of gender, which are to secure a “safe” gender identity, or as Kimmel puts it, “As fathers, they could prevent their sons from becoming delinquent, gay, Communist, or irresponsible beatniks ... Men had to be dedicated fathers to offset dominant motherhood and to help their son resist the temptation of gender nonconformity” (Kimmel 160). Propagating hegemonic masculinity is a way of rescuing the son from alternative lifestyles, and by appealing to the concept of manhood, it presents a powerful strategy to guarantee obedience and a straight middle-class lifestyle. The rhetoric of masculinity and gender plays on the psychological fear of gender transgression and the taboo of homosexuality; by failing to adhere to the norms, one’s sexuality as well as masculinity is called into question.

Hegemonic masculinity also involves success in the arena of business and politics. The features involve: “autonomy, self-discipline, competitiveness in the marketplace, entrepreneurship, and an anxious striving for money and prestige” (Strychacz 76). These are qualities that a man should have and which separate him from domesticated women and irresponsible children. Kimmel argues that in the Eisenhower years of 1950s America, “Being a breadwinner and family provider remained the centerpiece of middle-class masculinity” (161). Suttree rejects the gender norms of his generation and refuses to adopt middle-class masculinity. He tells his maternal uncle: “I’m not like him [his father]. I’m not like Carl [his brother]. I’m like me” (21). The novel’s eponymous main character is in many regards the antithesis of Arthur Miller’s character Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman* (1949) because he declines to partake in the heteronormative lifestyle of the middle class as well as he refuses to compromise his identity by regenerating the masculine ideal of the times.

Instead, Suttree chooses to live a modest life in his houseboat, fishing his own meals and frequently sharing his food with the poor inhabitants of McAnally.

Some critics have noted Thoreauian undertones in Suttree's rejection of capitalism or even modernity (Young 102), but from the viewpoint of masculinity this does not seem accurate. Thoreau advocated the self-made man's ethos, "shunning the company of women in order to create himself" (Kimmel 42). The novel's protagonist, however, is not a proud maker of his own fortune but wallows in self-pity and is barely able to survive on his old houseboat. He is passive, often dependent on checks sent by his mother as well as he is a hopeless drunk. There is no proud, self-assertive masculinity to detect. *Suttree* may be read as a critique of American masculine ideals, opposing both the self-made man's ethos and corporate masculinity. Moreover, the text does not seem to depict the "middle-class house" as a feminized space which accompanies Thoreauian masculine ideology (Kimmel 40). Instead, the house is uninhabitable because of a controlling and commanding father figure. The novel, therefore, does not depict an escape from the feminine in order to re-establish some sort of true masculinity of the wilderness, but from an oppressive masculine space. The text presents a protest against the male norms and reveals the vulnerability and insecurity behind what may be deemed the mask in masculinity. But, breaking out of gendered structures may cause a conflict of identity, whereby Suttree has to negotiate between different masculinities in the subcultural environment of Knoxville.

Suttree's struggle with identity is manifested by a double: his stillborn brother. The protagonist refers to himself as "the ordinary of the second son" and "Mirror image ... I followed him into the world, me" (16). At the root lies an identity complex since he feels he is not a complete individual but a fake or a copy. This feeling of inferiority is central to his sense of being the wrong son. Moreover, Suttree suffers from dextrocardia, a condition which indicates that his heart is placed on the right side of the chest, as if suggesting that he is a

mirror image of his twin brother. His different anatomy suggests that his heart is in a “different place,” indicating that he is not like the rest of his family. Suttree needs to fill the lack his stillborn brother caused, whom he “shared [his] mother’s belly” (16). The mother’s womb is thus established as a site where the protagonist previously had a sense of unity, where he was fused with his mirror image. It also presents the mother as the only route to wholeness. The figure of the twin is also McCarthy’s strategy of pointing out a psychological doubleness, a split self, manifested by his two alter egos: Suttree and anti-suttree (also called othersuttree). This doubleness has several implications: Suttree’s split allegiance between his parents, his contradicting personality traits, his class liminality, as well as his confused allegiance with the Father-deity and the Mother-deity.

The Haunting Father and Persecutory Fears

In a dream I was stopped by a man I took to be my father, dark figure against the shadowed brick. I would go by but he stayed me with his hand. I have been looking for you, he said. The wind was cold, dreamwinds are so, I had been hurrying. I would draw back from him and his bone grip. The knife he held severed the pallid lamplight like a thin blue fish and our footsteps amplified themselves in the emptiness of the streets to an echo of routed multitudes. Yet it was not my father but my son who accosted me with such rancorless intent.

(McCarthy 32)

Described as a “dark figure,” the father is an enigmatic and threatening presence, holding Suttree back with force. “His bone grip” suggests a figure of death persecuting him as he declares to Suttree: “I have been looking for you”—a threatening statement in the context of the dark imagery. Thomas D. Young suggests that the dream indicates “Suttree’s feeling of

guilt in having abandoned his son, as perhaps he feels himself to be similarly forsaken” (109). Young fails to acknowledge the persecutory anxiety which both Suttree’s father and son represent. They confront Suttree with what he feels he *should* be—the good and responsible father, and the good and obedient son. In refusing to conform to the type of person he is supposed to be, he is tormented by loved ones, which result in disturbing dreams such as the one in which a “rage-strangled face scream[ed] at him.” (93)

In her essay *Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-Depressive States*, Melanie Klein examines anxiety in children and how it is often experienced as fear of persecution and annihilation: “Unpleasant experiences and the lack of enjoyable ones, in the young child, especially lack of happy and close contact with loved people, increase ambivalence, diminish trust and hope and confirm anxieties about inner annihilation and external persecution” (150). Moreover, she argues that in the event of “internal persecutors,” following feelings of guilt, there is an “ensuing flight to the idealized internal object” (*Envy and Gratitude* 11). Suttree is often described as a child or as childlike: “The child buried within him” (142), or the “Child of darkness” (179). Moreover, McCarthy emphasizes the protagonist’s childhood through flashbacks and repressed memories which carry significance to his current predicament. He is persecuted by his parents—the father who is always threatening, and the mother who is alternately a good mother and a intimidating mother. His biological mother seems to take on the function of an idealized internal object. This seems even more plausible by the affectionate name McCarthy gives her: Grace. The novel makes it clear that the protagonist is still experiencing childhood fears and anxieties which seem to be triggered by the lack of fatherly love. In a dialogue with his maternal uncle, Suttree exclaims that: “When a man marries beneath him his children are beneath him ... I’m saying my father is contemptuous of me because I’m related to you” (22). The contempt his father has for him is twofold: He is the son of a woman of the lower classes, in addition to the fact that he identifies more with his

mother than with him. Thus, Suttree has ambivalent feelings towards the father—he resents him for what he represents, yet wants his love.

The dream of the father persecuting him and trying to kill him seems to be related to the prologue and the epilogue in which grim reaper-like figure hunts him with dogs. This framing technique creates a narrative effect of persecution which permeates the novel. The prologue almost conveys a feeling of paranoia with its gothic style:

We are come to a world within the world ... The night is quiet. Like a camp before a battle. The city beset by a thing unknown and will it come from forest or sea? The murengers have walled the pale, the gates are shut, but lo the thing's inside and can you guess his shape? Where he's kept or what's the counter of his face? Is he a weaver, bloody shuttle shot through a timewarp, a carder of souls from the world's nap? Or a hunter with hounds or do bone horses draw his deadcart through the streets and does he call his trade to each? Dear friend he is not to be dwelt upon for it is by just suchwise that he's invited in. (5)

The opening sentence—“We are come to a world within the world”—refers to the mental sphere, Suttree's inner world. Murengers, or wall keepers, allude to psychological walls or defenses although “the thing's inside” already. There are similarities here with the already mentioned dream in which Suttree is attacked by his father and son. The countenance is hidden, as in the other dream, and the “bone horses” mirror the bone grip of his father who has infiltrated his psyche, tormenting and threatening him with annihilation. Suttree's father is metaphorically described as a “carder of souls,” trying to destroy his autonomy by stealing his inner essence and making him become like him. The protagonist must flee from his father even though, mentally, his presence lingers. When describing his problematic relationship to

his father, Suttree sees watching eyes in the knots of the wooden panel: “Behind him in the western wall the candled woodknots shone blood red and incandescent like the eyes of watching fiends” (18). He feels his father’s ominous presence, condemning his lifestyle.

Arguing for a gnostic reading of the novel, Dianne Luce suggests that Suttree’s denunciation of the father is related to his rejection of materialism (232). Although this is one possible aspect of the conflict, Luce overlooks the lost mother, the theme of the oppressive father and McCarthy’s focus on class and masculinity. There seems to be more to the text than the protagonist’s refusal of riches and a comfortable upper-class life. Suttree hates his father for alienating him from his mother and wants to return to her and the mother-child bond devoid of the father’s judgment. Moreover, a simple differentiation between spiritual and material matters confuses the issue because the father is also implemented in the former as a patriarchal deity, to which I will return shortly.

As the novel progresses, the protagonist gradually distances himself from the father but nothing can weigh him down. In one episode in the novel, Suttree helps his friend, Weird Leonard, dump Leonard’s deceased father in the Tennessee River. Leonard and his mother have kept his dead body for six months in order to keep receiving welfare money but have decided to dispose of it because of the smell. They weigh the body down with chains and rims before tossing it in the river. The father, lying in the boat covered by sheets, appears as a “Dead klansman” (304), alluding to the history of racism as well as highlighting the body’s ghostly attire. When the two meet again, Leonard gloomily informs of the macabre “second coming” of the father: “‘He come up, Sut. Draggin all them chains with him.’ ‘Fathers will do that,’ said Suttree” (502). The imagery of the father coming back from the dead, rattling his chains gives clear associations to a spectral presence haunting the living. The remark reveals the protagonist’s feelings about his own father psychologically haunting and tormenting him. By helping Leonard, Suttree is attempting to symbolically bury his own father in order to

discard him from his psyche. But despite his efforts to reject and rid himself of his father, the man remains in Suttree's mind. As Suttree warns of in the prologue: "Dear friend he is not to be dwelt upon for it is by just suchwise that he's invited in" (5). There is also another aspect to the paternal burial. Leonard is gay and a "part-time catamite" (293), which may indicate his need to dispose of his father. Thus, he is another example of a father figure demanding sexual conformity. The episode alludes to the conservative zeitgeist of the 1950s—an era where homosexuality was condemned and even outlawed by the judiciary. Their shared paternal problem reflects the dominating role of the father within the family and brings to light the encroachment of the family institution upon the individual's sexual preferences.

The Family Institution and the Alternative Family of the Streets

Suttree's unwillingness to follow in his father's footsteps manifests itself in his radical decision to leave his wife and child. McCarthy seems to offer a critique of the institution of family and how it traps people into a fixed gender behavior—as domesticated wives and breadwinning fathers. Suttree sees male "family monarchs" everywhere, especially in the world he has left behind. When attending his son's funeral, he observes his in-laws: "[watching] him from the porch, gathered there like a sitting for some old sepia tintype, the mother's hand on the seated patriarch's shoulder" (181). The man is seated like a king and their posture looks old fashioned to Suttree. They are frozen in time, fixed in old gender roles establishing the American culture as traditionally governed by men such as his biological father. "[Suttree's] repudiation of [his] natural father functions metaphorically to suggest [his] rebellion against dominant culture of the fatherland, America (Luce 234). Luce's use of the word "fatherland" seems to pinpoint the issue of a father-dominated space of oppression. The novel seems to be a direct critique of the gender politics of the US, as well as culturally promoted male behavior.

However, not every family in the text is governed by men. When Suttree spends time living with the Reese family dragging mussels, the father warns him: “You caint depend on no women to do business” (400). The two leave in order to sell mussel pearls without the women, but are ridiculed when the pearls are worthless (402). Reese is exposed as an incompetent businessman completely ignorant of the trade he pursues. The contrast between his belittling of women and the subsequent failure of his own seems to be an ironic play on the bloated egos of men. Suttree later notes that: “All were brought into such close and constant communion by the rain that the configuration of the family seemed to alter. A frailly structured matriarchy showed itself in these latter days, and Suttree reckoned it had always been so” (431). “Frailly” may carry negative connotations, playing on the protagonist’s prejudice against families run by women, but it might also highlight the difference from his strict father-dominated household. The scene depicts a warm, loving family household that the protagonist desires. This episode may be seen as contradictory to the established scenario of the governing father but McCarthy seems to imply that there are exceptions, especially in families outside the capitalist system. He draws to our attention that the father-driven family is not a “natural” organizing principle, but a culturally promoted one through hegemonic power.

Even though Suttree runs away from his own father, he is not fatherless. He finds alternative fathers in Knoxville who he confides and respects. The goatman, the ragpicker, the Indian, and Abednego Jones all give their fatherly advice to Suttree. And, there is Daddy Watson who refers to Suttree as “son” and whom Suttree simply calls “Daddy” (104). Suttree’s relationship to these elders is of a more genuine nature than his somewhat superficial bonds to his rowdy drinking buddies. They partake in conversations about death, religion and the afterlife, issues that relate to Suttree’s anxieties: “‘Shit,’ said the ragpicker. ‘Here’s one that’s sick of livin... An old man’s days are hours’. ‘And what happens then?’

‘When?’ ‘After you’re dead.’ ‘Don’t nothin happen. You’re dead.’ ‘You told me once you believed in God’. The old man waived his hand. ‘Maybe,’ he said. ‘I got no reason he believes in me’” (312). While visiting Daddy Watson, the protagonist gets a sensation that his bunk was “strangely like his own” (218). The bunk bed reminds Suttree of his own childhood bed which in turn strengthens the parallel between Daddy and Suttree’s father. In a sense, Daddy Watson is the benevolent father figure which Suttree needs in order to replace his malevolent original, which is the reason why McCarthy chooses to call him Daddy. Semantically, “daddy” is an endearing term as opposed to the formal “father.” The different denominators reflect the protagonist’s different attitudes towards these paternal figures.

Suttree himself also functions as a “surrogate father,” especially to the somewhat childish character Harrogate (Walsh 187): “‘Have you eaten anything?’ Harrogate shook his head. ‘Shit no. I’m a mere shadder.’ ‘Well, let’s see about getting some groceries in your skinny gut’” (207). It is Suttree who protects Harrogate in prison, clothes and feeds him and eventually saves his life when he lies wounded in the underground caves of Knoxville after trying to realize one of his strange schemes. Harrogate brings forth Suttree’s compassionate and caring qualities which reveal that he is capable of being a good father. His fatherly attitude shows that it is not fatherhood itself Suttree flees from but the family institution and the obligatory middle-class masculinity. He finds companionship in his alternative family of the street, in subcultures where affiliations are looser. What knits them together is their exclusion from the overall community and the fact that they form a subcultural family of the rejected. Suttree’s Knoxville is a “fellowship of the doomed” (McCarthy 27). Towering over them is the harsh father-deity, a figure of condemnation and oppression.

The Father-Deity of the Catholic Church

McCarthy's text evokes another father-figure who threatens with the imprisonment of conformity. As Suttree drunkenly stumbles into a church, he sees in the ceiling a "patriarchal deity in robes and beard lurch[ing] across the cracking plaster. Attended by thunder, by fat infants with dovewings grown from their shoulderbone." (309). The almighty mirrors his father as another persecutory element condemning Suttree for his lifestyle. The image is described in mocking and impious terms: the cherubs are fat infants and the cracked plaster highlights the artifice as well as the crumbling façade of the authoritative Holy Father. The church demands obedience, propagating heteronormativity, an ideology which excludes and alienates the marginalized of Suttree's social sphere. Suttree is awoken by a priest—"God's house is not exactly the place to take a nap," he said. 'It's not God's house.' 'Oh?' 'It's not God's house'" (309)—and he reacts to the discourse of ownership which suggests that the church is not for everyone, but has a Father that governs and owns the house—a metaphor which might be extended to implicate society at large.

The church signifies another system of subordination and discrimination closely connected to the world of Suttree's father, where "sinners" face eternal torment in a merciless hell. The church uses fear as a tactic to secure conformity both in gender and sexual terms, warning that homosexual practice is sinful. There is a link between the protagonist's rejection of the Catholic Church and his connection to the transgendered Trippin through the Dew, one of the individuals vilified by the church. It is an institution which propagates a holy union between men and women, solidifying a conservative family institution, and even decries the sexual act itself as filthy. Called *The Church of the Immaculate Conception*, the drunken Suttree ironically notes: "The virtues of a stainless birth were not lost on him, no not on him" (307). The church stands for a deceitful ideology of conservative values and is a power structure that demands conformity. He notes "black clad keepers with ...neat little boots ...

spectacles, the deathreek of the dark and half scorched muslin that they wore” (309). The church and the world of his father are perceived as a place of desolation, falseness and death in contrast to his community in Knoxville and its “men rich with vitality” (309). The depiction of the church as a dead place refers back to the scene when Suttree visits his father’s dilapidated family house where “Something more than time has passed ... (163). The house is a remnant, not only of the decaying system of aristocracy, but also of the male ruler, the “aging magistrate,” and “master of the table” (162, 163). McCarthy critiques the androcentric worldview, both of the church and of Western culture at large. The cracked image of the patriarchal God and the “blind parget cherubs” (162) show their blindness to the world and are laid bare as false idols and corrupted ideals. As Suttree leaves, he observes a sign which “someone must have turned ... around because it posted the outer world” (164). The house of the father is a structure imposed on the outer world, barring reality itself from its walls.

In the slums of McAnally, the Catholic Church and the ideology of the father have their own representative. Shouting out allegations of sin and of the apocalypse, the “old crazy reverend” (133) is another condemning figure. He has castrated himself to show his devotion to the church, or as Trippin Through The Dew puts it: “Trimmed hisself. With a razor. Just sliced em on off honey ...” (133). The reverend represents the fear of paternal castration, threatening the protagonist by confronting him with his sinful lifestyle. To him, Suttree’s affiliation with the queer and transgendered identities, as well as the prostitutes, is immoral and shameful. When Suttree breaks off his relationship with Joyce, the prostitute, the reverend exclaims: “another hero home from the whores” (496). The reverend is thus another policing authority, harassing the main character using the rhetoric of eternal damnation to ensure conformity. Yet, the man of the cloth challenges the father’s claim of potency because he himself has been maimed by the rigid patriarchal God.

The text contrasts the Holy Father with another deity-like figure: Mother She. Mother She is a witch, a “hookbacked crone” with “spider hands” (335), who does not appear in photographs (337). Although she is the mother of all things, she also represents the decay of the flesh and the certainty of one’s biological demise. As opposed to the fake Father of the church painted on the ceiling, Mother She represents the spiritual, manifested in corporeal reality. She does not condemn, and her non-moralizing world view embraces the sinners and lowlife drunks. She represents a gynocentric cosmology ignored and subdued by hegemonic culture. I will return to the figure of Mother She in Chapter Four.

“I sort of inherited my line from another man”: Regenerating the Father

In Suttree’s dream, his father turns into his own son, which leads to an uncanny realization that he is like his father, and that his son will be like him. While browsing through the family album, Suttree exclaims: “I am, I am. An artifact of prior races” (154), acknowledging a certain fixity of the self. He tries to escape his father, decrying his values but cannot completely rid himself of his influence. He is already tainted by the pervasive world view of the past. As he himself puts it: “I sort of inherited my line from another man” (292).

The father’s misogyny, however, can also be discerned in Suttree. When his girlfriend Joyce struggles with personal problems and suffers a mental breakdown, he calls her a “dizzy cunt” to which she replies: “You son of a bitch ... You couldn’t say: It’s okay honey, or say, or say...” (493). Instead of being understanding and caring, he just sees her as a “petulant child” (493). He infantilizes his love interest and thus repeats his father’s treatment of his mother. Furthermore, his relationships to women are seldom personal because women are incomprehensible to him. At one point they are even depicted as figmental: “Old shapeless women in thin summer dresses, socks collapsed about their pale and naked ankles, shoes opened at the side with knives to ease their feet ... To Suttree they seemed hardly real” (70).

Suttree seems fairly close to being a hypocrite when he describes a childhood picture of himself as depicting the “congenitally disaffected,” meaning “born opposing authority” (154). He thinks of himself as embracing the marginalized and oppressed, but curiously he lets misogynistic and racist remarks go by unopposed: “‘Besides they’s niggers lives next door.’ ‘Oh well,’ said Suttree. ‘Niggers’” (138). His anger at racism is ultimately revealed when, after Ab Jones is beaten by the police, he steals a police car and drives it into the Tennessee River. Likewise, Suttree silently accepts misogynist comments by his Knoxville friends. He has rebelled against his father but finds it harder to rebel against his surrogate fathers, somewhat naïvely accepting the way of life in his lower-class environment.

Even though he reenacts his father in his final quarrel with Joyce, their relationship presents a denouncement of his father’s masculinity. After having a “traditional” relationship with a girl named Wanda, Suttree has a somewhat unconventional love affair with Joyce. Whereas Wanda is a stereotypical figure of a feminine woman—“pure,” submissive yet also an aspiring nurse—Joyce is a strong and independent countertype. Their relationship reverses the gender-dynamic of the heteronormative 1950s family lifestyle which involved the breadwinning father and the stay-at-home mother. The “marriage” with Joyce is an ironic subversion of their parents’ values: “In the morning he put her on the bus, kissing her there at the steps where the driver stood with his tickets and his puncher and the diesel smoke swirled in the cold, Suttree smiling to himself at this emulation of some domestic trial or lovers parted by fate and will they meet again?” (478). The “emulation” shows the couple act out the married lifestyle of the time in which the novel is set, in what Walsh calls a “mock-bourgeois courtship” (194). They imitate middle class life, making fun of the establishment. Suttree and Joyce have broken out of the pattern—the law of the normative family structure in which the man takes part in the public domain and earns money, whereas the woman inhabits the private

domain. It is Suttree who becomes the “sitter at windows” (479), and Joyce his financial supporter. Joyce dresses him in new expensive clothes and even buys him a car.

For Luce, Joyce is “The female analogue of the men he befriends” (243), while Young sees her as “the only other character in the novel who approaches equal footing with Suttree both intellectually and verbally” (118). What Luce detects are Joyce’s masculine qualities as frank and foulmouthed similar to those of his rowdy drinking buddies. Her vulgar attitude appeals to Suttree as a challenge to traditional femininity. Joyce stands in stark contrast to the women he encounters earlier in the novel while in the wilderness, who set the coffeepot “with a studied domesticity which in this outlandish setting caused Suttree to smile” (419)—women who are trapped in recreating gendered roles which take on absurd proportions. He notes that “there was about them something subdued beyond their normal reticence. *As if order had been forced upon them from without*” (420, emphasis added). Their gendered behavior seems almost involuntary, which indicates that family structures uphold and propagate gender conformism. Joyce, on the other hand, has broken out of the expected norm and entered into the realm of the excluded. McCarthy seems to suggest that it is only by refusing the institutions of society that one can be, to a certain extent, free. However, Joyce is reduced to a commodity through her occupation. She, in a fit of rage, tears up dollar bills and smashes their car—a symbolic gesture which reveals her anger at being bought and sold.

The trope of the triangle is reinstated once again when Joyce is the romantic interest of both Suttree and her girlfriend. This adds another dimension to Joyce, as it implies that her depression is the result of a lost love and an unfulfilled homosexual relationship. Joyce oscillates between Suttree in Knoxville, and her girlfriend in Chicago, which marks her as a liminal character much like the protagonist. Her confused gender identity may be a backdrop when McCarthy focuses on the “old razor scars on her inner wrist” (486), an image which hints at a conflicted individual and gives an added depth to the character. Luce notes that

Suttree is “ashamed of Joyce except when she appears ‘ladylike’” (246). When in public, her personality embarrasses him and causes him to take her home (483). She is deemed unable to play the adequate female role, revealing the protagonist’s subscription to societal norms. Her gender insecurity is emphasized by her acting out her identity as a prostitute. She is described as giving him a “big whore’s wink” (483) and striking a “classic hooker’s pose” (480), both indicating she is performing the desired role. However in her smashing up of the car and breaking off the relationship with Suttree, Joyce is one of the few female characters who are not simply passive victims but is an active agent in her ultimate rejection of her lover. Luce points out her similarities to the protagonist and argues that the destructive act “[echo] Suttree’s own forgotten rejection of his family’s wealth” (Luce, 248). Being a character in opposition to society and materialism, Joyce mirrors the protagonist as well as reminds him of his repudiation of the father.

Suttree seems to contain similarities to what Mary McGilchrist identifies in her gender reading of *The Border Trilogy*. The men of the trilogy are corrupted and tainted by an ideology based on the cowboy myth which has made them unable to “relate effectively to the human feminine” (McGilchrist 189). In *Suttree*, McCarthy employs the trope of the persecuting father in order to dramatize the gender norms forced upon male subjects. It is the father who has alienated Suttree from his mother and from the feminine. As this chapter has argued, the text depicts the escape from hegemonic masculinity and by making the protagonist’s escape route towards the realm of the mother, suggests that only by connecting with the inner feminine can the protagonist escape the overarching patriarchal hegemony. He has lost Grace, his mother, and thus his quest is to find her. Whereas *The Border Trilogy* depicts a scenario where men can only imitate masculine myths, *Suttree* more directly stages a denouncement of androcentric ideology but also highlights the problems in shedding it

altogether. The haunting father keeps reappearing, causing the protagonist to take shelter in his mother's world—the slums of McAnally—where he has to renegotiate his identity.

Chapter 3: Negotiations of Identity

Having fled from the father and hegemonic masculinity, Cornelius Suttree has to redefine his identity in the slums of Knoxville. The novel draws attention to the construction of male identity as the protagonist experiences certain aspects of masculinity as oppressive and subsequently critiques its violent manifestations. In line with Mary McGilcrist's argument with regards to McCarthy's western novels, I find that Suttree too "blur[s] ... gender boundaries" (182), both by portraying the main character as a liminal figure who identifies with his mother, and in his relationship to the transgendered character Trippin Through The Dew—a figure who reflects Suttree's gendered twoness. This chapter will examine the different masculinities portrayed in the text and how the main character gradually identifies with the feminine. Through the epiphanic powers of Mother She, Suttree is able to overcome his fear of homosexuality and recognize his spiritual kinship to the queer and transgendered identities of Knoxville.

The Oscillations of Gender Identity

This 'being a man' and 'being a woman' are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (Butler, *Bodies* 126, 127)

Suttree dramatizes the instability of gender identity, symbolized by the protagonist's sense of a split self as well as the oedipal oscillation between father and mother. He is in a predicament because both options present ambiguities: the father is an oppressive authority and the mother

a forbidden identity. In accordance with heteronormativity, Suttree should identify with his father and desire his mother in what Freud labeled as the “positive Oedipus-complex,” which is to guarantee heterosexuality (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 85). But the issue is more complex. Suttree is drawn toward identification with the mother, which frightens him since it challenges the heterosexual male scenario. He chooses to uproot himself from his middle-class background and move into the slums of Knoxville in order to find a place to belong to, but also to find out who he is.

Suttree can be read as a *Bildungsroman*; the formative journey toward maturity renders the protagonist at the end of the book a different person from the one in the beginning.⁶ But instead of the usual trajectory where the protagonist gains access to civilization and is incorporated into its institutions, Suttree gains maturity in his rejection of society and by breaking its laws—acts which brings personal and spiritual insights. William C. Spencer calls it his “vision quest” and refers to Native American rituals used in order to “receive visions that would empower them [the Native Americans] and give direction and meaning to their lives” (100). Although enlightening, Spencer’s reading obscures the notion of class and gender identity that is central to the novel. Suttree’s journey goes from middle-class life within hegemony towards the marginalized, as he tries to discard the masculine regulations imposed on him as a gendered subject. A similar theme is depicted in *The Crossing*, where the protagonist “denies the masculine world of his father by his identification with [a] she-wolf, and enters into her female realm” (McGilchrist 191). Suttree’s entry into the world of his mother is not only in order to escape the father, but also a sign of his identification with her. The mother becomes a trope for those who are dominated by the powerful fathers: the

⁶ Note that Mary McGilchrist makes a similar observation with regards to *The Border Trilogy*: “McCarthy ... has appropriated the classic American myth structure, associated as it so often is with the coming-of-age story of a young man—the myth of the lone man in the West—in order to subvert it and all its attendant false histories” (191).

homosexuals, transgendered. These are the “others” to Suttree, who himself is part of the white, heterosexual and capitalist society of 1950s America.

In male-dominated culture and institutions, as well as in McCarthy’s homosocial texts, women are represented as the “other.” In her analysis of Freud’s Oedipus Complex, which was critiqued for propagating patriarchal ideology, Madeleine Sprengnether brings in the concept of the “(m)other” (233) in relation to the mother’s loss of subjectivity in Freud’s male-centered discourse. Instead of simply seeing the mother as a threat to ego formation as Freud does, Sprengnether insists that “If the mother’s body in its otherness represents estrangement as well as origin, it also provides a paradigm for the construction of the ego ...” (233). Thus, the mother is placed at the center of ego formation instead of being its hindrance. This distinction is staged in *Suttree*, because it is the mother who motivates Suttree’s journey towards insight and who makes him question both his gender and class-identity. The mother is in this sense a “primary other” that leads him to the marginalized of society. Similar to *The Border Trilogy*, McCarthy’s male protagonist embarks on a journey in which he “seek[s] confirmation of identity” (McGilchrist 126), and, like Billy in *The Crossing*, Suttree is a character defined by his in-betweenness.

Suttree lives in a houseboat on the Tennessee River but leads a nomadic lifestyle. He never stays long on the river but lives in motel rooms, in the houses of friends, even outdoors. The protagonist’s lifestyle accentuates his internal instability and search of some kind of identification and of a home. He is a loner seeking a community. The concept of the houseboat defies the traditional view of the house as rooted firmly to the ground and fixed in one place, and suggests an uprooted dwelling rocking on the watery element. Thus, the houseboat becomes a central trope for the protagonist’s instable selfhood—it is a home which is in constant movement as it fluctuates upon the river waves. The river is described as a *Cloaca Maxima* (15) referring to the old Roman sewer—an indication of Suttree’s connection

to the people of the gutter. Moreover, homelessness is also a liminal state which represents “[i]n both its romanticized and objectified manifestations ... the condition of the Other” (Allen 5). Suttree is not one of the marginalized but occupies the space and *condition* of the other with whom he wants to merge. However, he can never be like the other. Suttree’s Catholic and middle-class background as well as his college education have given him a different understanding of the world. As the protagonist puts it, he was born “breech ... Hind end fore in common with whales and bats, life forms meant for other mediums than the earth and having no affinity for it” (16). He compares himself to whales and bats which are blind creatures, indicating that Suttree was born into a “blind” existence. In a conversation about his mother and how she is subjugated by the father, the trope of colorblindness is introduced: “You are colorblind, aren’t you?” (23). Colorblindness suggests seeing the world only in black and white—referring to the racism, sexism and the disgust for the lower classes which Suttree’s father harbors. However, by uprooting himself and finding himself in the slums of McAnally, Suttree is learning to see the world with all its different nuances and colors.

His plurality of names is yet another indication of his conflict of identity. Christopher J. Walsh remarks that he is alternately called Buddy, Bud, Sut and Youngblood, in addition to Suttree (215).⁷ His multiple names reveal the novel’s negotiations of identity by way of his fluctuation between different groups. He is called Buddy by his family, Suttree and Sut by his drinking-buddies, and Youngblood by his black friend Ab Jones. There is an underlying tension which torments Suttree, because every identification and position presents a loss.

Metaphorically, Suttree’s psychological struggle with identity is rendered through the use of the twin or the double. The protagonist perceives an “Anti-Suttree” and, at times, an “othersuttree.” The paradoxical term “Anti-Suttree” merges the opposite, “anti,” with what is

⁷ Walsh fails to notice, however, that he is addressed by his original first-name, Cornelius—a significant occurrence which will be addressed in Chapter Four.

allegedly the stable and same. Thus, “Anti-Suttree” breaks down the dichotomy between self and other, and posits the possibility of the other as part of the self. It also symbolizes his Oedipal struggle between the father and the mother, in his attempt to move towards the perceived “anti”—the feminine part of his psyche. Robert Jarrett presents a similar interpretation in his reading of what he identifies as the Lacanian double: “The novel’s persistent imagery of the double indicates that Suttree’s dilemma stems from a fragmentation of his psyche, a split between two principles of self that must somehow be merged or reincorporated” (58). Jarrett sets up two oppositional selves: the self of the “forbidding father who worships society’s structures of power in the courts and business ... [and] his lower-class mother whom he sees as attempting to infantilize him with her tears” (58) on the one hand, and declares the anti-Suttree as “the primal or primitive self of the Lacanian *moi*” (59) on the other. Although Jarrett identifies the split self as a manifestation of Suttree’s opposition to societal structures, he surprisingly places the mother and father on the same side of the identification process. Jarrett’s interpretation is problematic because Lacan’s concept relates to the belief in the self as an autonomous being in the meeting with its mirror image, but Suttree, in fact, has a *double* mirror image. He sees himself twinned in people’s eyes and, sometimes, in their sunglasses as if perceiving two selves (McCarthy, 62). Moreover, Lacan’s mirror stage describes a scenario where the child “gains a sense of wholeness, an ideal completeness” (Wright 100), which seems to run counter to Suttree’s liminal identity. These aspects, I argue, challenge Jarrett’s Lacanian reading. *Suttree* posits a triangular drama where the protagonist must negotiate between the father and the mother and what they stand for. Furthermore, his relationship to his mother is more complex than Jarrett proposes. Suttree searches for the mother’s womb for which his houseboat can be seen as a substitute—a cradle rocking on the river waves. But the womb is also a place of isolation and loneliness.

Suttree's childhood is presented as fragmented memories which reveal an imposed gendered behavior. In one recollection, he remembers his grandmother's death and his reaction to it: "I would not cry. My sisters cried" (155). Suttree did not refrain from crying because he felt no sorrow or pain. The determination "I *would not* cry" indicates a withholding of tears, while the subsequent sentence shows the protagonist's understanding that crying is feminine. Judith Butler argues that gendered norms reveal an underlying law of conduct which is repeated and ritualized (*Bodies* 95). Crying becomes a gendered prohibition that must be upheld in order not to transgress the established rules of conduct. This same prohibition reoccurs later in the novel: "Suttree suddenly began to cry. He didn't know that he was going to and he was ashamed. The counterman looked away" (354). Crying triggers shame because it breaks with his and society's projection of maleness and social rules of "proper" masculinity. He is taught to behave in a certain manner which involves concealing emotions. The man behind the counter is also uncomfortable in being confronted with male vulnerability, and reacts by turning away. When Wanda is killed in an accident, the text describes his intentions of silencing: "He was a man with no plans for going back the way he'd come nor telling any soul at all what he had seen" (437). The masculine mask of self-composure and invulnerability keep Suttree from sharing his emotional problems with others. Tellingly, his most cathartic and earnest dialogue is with himself, in his conversation with his mirror reflection (498). Suttree's tendency of repression is aesthetically manifested in McCarthy's narrative format. The protagonist-narrator omits painful details of the past, in what may be called a textual silencing, as if he does not want to disclose them. Thus, the text does not reveal details as to why he left his wife and child, nor does it tell the full story of his relationship to his parents. As Young notes, "[the family drama] must be pieced together ..." (99). McCarthy constructs his story with gaps which must be filled in although presenting the missing pieces through symbols and allegories, making the text as a whole enigmatic and

allusive. Thus, the aspect of repression is at the forefront of the text both aesthetical and thematically. However, as the novel progresses, Suttree explores his gender identity and overcomes his repressions.

Having established the character's liminal identity, the rest of the chapter will focus on the protagonist's implications with sub-hegemonic masculinities and his ultimate rejection of it.

The Sub-Hegemonic Masculinity of McAnally

After rejecting middle-class life, Suttree moves down the social ladder and into the *Lumpenproletariat* of Knoxville, the class Friedrich Engels called the "scum of depraved elements of all classes, with headquarters in the big cities" (qtd. in Connell 197). It is a fluid space filled with the rejected identities of hegemonic society and located on the outside of the institutions. Although a haven for the rejected of society, the slums are governed by a different masculinity: a violent one which does not fit with the orderly requirements of society. It is in this sense a subordinated masculinity, one that entails poverty and exclusion, but McAnally has its own power structures. In both the middle class and the *Lumpenproletariat*, there are social hierarchies with a "correct" masculinity at the top. In the latter, its standards include being physically strong, courageous and heterosexual. The masculine hierarchy guarantees the subordination of, not only women, but all marginalized identities. It is into this milieu that Suttree initially places himself.

According to R.W. Connell's schema of hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and marginalized masculinities, the middle-class masculinity of the father is hegemonic since it "is likely to be established only if there is some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective if not individual" (76). Connell's aim is to reveal the power structures implicit in gendered structures but his categorization places us in a predicament: is

the machismo of McAnally a subordinate masculinity? Although true that it is somewhat excluded from society, it is still hegemonic within its own class parameters and within culture at large. Connell's definition leaves out the term heteronormative, a concept which indicates the underlying cultural mechanisms which regulate gendered conduct. In order to highlight the idealized masculinity of McAnally as hegemonic and at the same time underline its difference from the institutionalized hegemonic, I suggest the term sub-hegemonic. The sub-hegemonic masculinity, as the designation indicates, is subordinate but still retains a degree of cultural legitimacy because it is still based on traditional male norms. Furthermore, both are hegemonic because they uphold and regulate gendered rules of conduct. Judith Butler notes that: "A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of *normalization* ... Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce" (*Undoing Gender*, 41). This normalization forces Suttree into a way of conduct he is not comfortable with and which presents a problem of identity. When he is forced to defend Gene Harrogate in the workhouse, the protagonist sees himself "twinned in the cool brown eyes" as he raises his fist, to which he notes "he didn't like what he saw" (62). His feeling of doubleness seems to be related to the behavior imposed on him as a male subject, and the sub-hegemonic environment is yet another structure of oppression similar to the world of the father.

McCarthy satirizes violent masculinities emphasizing its absurd implications. In his meeting with the men in the slums, Suttree's eagerness to behave in accordance with the masculine ideals runs counter to his own principles when a fight breaks out without any obvious reason. "'We've got to get these cunts,' said J-Bone" (225). Suttree goes along with his proposition, but seems in doubt: "Who the fuck are we fighting?" J-Bone's reply—"Who the fuck cares? If he aint from McAnally bust him" (226)—reveals the groups mentality and

makes it apparent that Suttree is not accustomed to the norms of McAnally's violent masculine environment. The senseless fight comes to an abrupt end when Suttree is hit in the head with a floor polisher: "He felt the vertebrae in his neck crack. The room and all in it turned white as noon. *He distinctly heard his mother say his name* (227, emphasis added). Here, Suttree's conflict of gendered identity comes to the fore as the mother enters his consciousness. She is internally present within him, representing a different side to his identity. In conforming to the gang of violent men, he has compromised his identity and selfhood, and the calling out of his name functions as a reminder of who he really is. Severely hurt and bleeding from his head, he encourages himself: "Do not go down," yet also reproaches himself: "What man is such a coward he would not rather fall once than remain forever tottering?" (227). He envisions a "foul hag" ridiculing him, tottering along with him before he hits the ground. Suttree's traditional views on what constitutes a man take on bizarre proportions when he discusses with himself whether to remain standing, or to dive to the ground. The expected male performance forces him to be strong, assertive and composed, even at the point of severe injury, and thus becomes a comical parody of masculinity. The absurdity of the situation underlines the irrational delusions of masculine myths—the same stoic fables McCarthy went on to criticize with *The Border Trilogy* by dismantling the American cowboy persona.

Amongst the men of McAnally, there is a masculine value system which rates toughness as a central quality. This manifests itself in the group's admiration for Irish Long who is mythologized due to his physical prowess: he would "mortally whip your ass if you messed with him ..." (30). This also can be seen in the meaningless exercise of violence by Billy Ray Callahan, one of the men at the top of the masculine hierarchy. Suttree once watches him "whip a boy from Vestal named George Holmes ... Callahan hit Holmes twice and Holmes went down. He'd let it go at that but the crowd called out for more. 'Stomp him

Red. Stomp his ass.’ He gave Holmes a few kicks but Holmes only doubled himself up on the sidewalk” (450). Callahan’s violence is performed before a crowd which urges him to further beat up the boy, to which he must concede. The crowd demands a certain behavior, encouraging the violent conduct. McCarthy does not provide any reason or context to the violence, emphasizing its inherent pointlessness. Later on, Callahan is senselessly shot and killed in a bar and Suttree observes his mother shaking “her head from side to side over her dead warrior” (454). The use of “warrior” is ironic and highlights the fact that Callahan’s senseless and destructive warfare was ultimately against himself.

Although violence is usually rendered as a senseless act in the context of McCarthy’s work, in *Suttree* it is stripped of his usual poetic renditions. Instead of his typical ambiguous depictions of it as both beautiful and horrific, violence is depicted soberly and mundane which reveal it as empty masculine self-assertiveness. Thus, fighting becomes a gendered need of authority and self-confirmation instead of expressing any metaphorical meaning: “Callahan would get slightly drunk and look about goodnaturedly to see was there thing or body worth destroying” (61). There seems to be a dehumanizing aspect to his thirst for violence, referring to people as bodies. McCarthy depicts Callahan as a social failure who is constantly looking for work without finding any (450), which might explain his need to physically dominate others.

McCarthy also introduces the problem of racism. Suttree’s close friend Ab Jones is fighting a hopeless and violent battle against a society which discriminates against him. “They don’t like no nigger walkin around like a man” (246), he tells Suttree. He engages in violent encounters with the police to prove himself a proper “man.” Emasculated by oppression, his answer to it is using physical force. The text describes how Ab becomes vengeful and “[bitter] over social class judgment” (Luce 253). Violence becomes a desperate attempt to uphold some kind of self-worth but also serves as a point of identification and solidification of

manhood. Ab Jones is an example of hypermasculinity, a towering and muscular character described as a “movie monster” (533). He dies on a pile of junk, which some critics have accused of being racist,⁸ but I propose that it is symbolical and must be understood in relation to the name McCarthy gives the character. Abednego is the name of one of the three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace after refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s gold idol (*Holy Bible*, Dan. 3.10-12). Therefore, Ab’s opposition to the authorities is allegorical of the fight against injustice and oppressive figures of power, and, like the junk he dies upon, he will be burnt in the furnace and reunited with God (Dan. 3.16-18, 24-30). Still, his destructive behavior makes his wife into one of the several female victims of the text who bemoans his violence: “I caint do nothing with him” (275). Suttree observes Abednego and Callahan’s demise from the viewpoint of their wife and mother. With Abednego, Suttree and his wife Doll are united in their concern for his violent protest, and with Callahan’s mother, he spends the night with her at the hospital. By observing how their violent behavior affects the women and loved ones, Suttree comes to see its destructive consequences.

The character of Gene Harrogate further highlights the protagonist’s sympathy with individuals excluded because they are different. Harrogate is barred from the masculine hierarchy because of his weak physique and boyish attitude. Sexually incompetent, he is introduced in the novel in an episode where he is having intercourse with melons and is subsequently caught and sent to prison. Although comical, the scene alludes to the policing of sexuality as he is hunted by farmers and ultimately shot and wounded for his “fruity” intercourse. The farmer’s stigmatization— “unnatural” (42)—belongs to the same discourse used which delegitimizes homosexuality. The barrel of the gun is described as a “smooth choked oiled pipe pointing judgment and guilt (42). The text highlights the 1950s paranoia of

⁸ “Jones’s death amongst the garbage highlights the materiality of his body and literalizes that body’s status as abject” (McKoy qtd. in Walsh 248).

sexual transgression when Harrogate is charged with bestiality and sent to the workhouse. Moreover, it introduces the word “queer” when he is ridiculed by his inmates with “a cantaloupe turned queer” (59). His inability to attract girls as well as his feeble looks, make him an outsider to the macho-environment of the jail and in the slums of Knoxville. His body is described in feminine terms. He has “bird’s ankles,” (122) “skip[s]” (123) instead of walks, and often drowns in his clothes (46). His feminine features exclude him from men’s company except for Suttree who takes care of him, showing fatherly love.

Harrogate is oppressed in the male milieu, singled out by his otherness. In jail, he is constantly threatened by other inmates: “‘If you dont get the fuck away from me I’m going to kick the shit out of you.’ ‘I just wanted to know where I was supposed to sleep.’ ‘Anywhere you like you squirrely son of a bitch now get the hell away from here’” (47). After being threatened with violence, he is removed from the other men and placed in the kitchen, washing dishes. At the end of the novel the reader learns that Harrogate’s father died before he was born, which in one sense might be read as McCarthy’s wish to show the dangers of feminization if one is brought up by women. However, the character has a naïve way about him which marks him as having spiritual freedom. He is light hearted and has not inherited the notion of hell and condemnation the protagonist has. He is carefree, brought up outside of the strict moralizing ideology of the Catholic Church and without a father forming him into gender conformity. However, his fall is instigated by his attempts at conforming to the masculine group. Harrogate desperately tries to fit in and gain access to power by means of money and success. He poisons bats, plugs the coin slots of phone booths and tries to blow himself into the Knoxville bank from underground—all crazy moneymaking schemes to gain in stature. Similar to the characters in *The Border Trilogy*, Harrogate is another youngster trying to emulate a stereotypical manhood even though his body has not yet developed properly. This does not prevent him from growing a “wispy” mustache, getting a corduroy

hat, smoking a cigar while tucking his shirt with his “thin little hands” (504). He wants to be “a man,” but his feminine physicality prevents him from successfully imitating masculine figures. In the end, he has to shave off his mustache, a symbolical gesture suggesting his failed attempt at gaining access to hegemonic masculinity.

Ultimately, he is a tragic figure. Not being able to fit in with the others, he is a loner who ends up fleeing from the law. While getting ready to leave Knoxville at the end of the novel, Suttree meets Harrogate’s sister who is looking for her brother to tell him that their mother has died. Similar to Suttree’s flight from his parents, Harrogate’s quest has alienated him from his sister and mother. His strivings to gain access to hegemonic masculinity have been destructive and futile. : “‘Maybe you should go out of town’ ... ‘Hell, Sut. I aint never been out of town. I wouldn’t know where to go ... I’d get lost and never get home again ever.’” (524)

The character of Gene Harrogate functions as a foil, a contrasting figure highlighting Suttree’s characteristics. We see that Suttree inhabits the acceptable masculinity whilst Harrogate is excluded and subjugated by the men of McAnally. Further, Harrogate and Suttree represent two different trajectories: Suttree who comes to reject the hegemonic and Harrogate who desires it. Harrogate’s oppression is one of several incidents which lead the protagonist to reject and disassociate himself from the sub-hegemony.

Misogyny and Oppression

The 1950s of Knoxville, Tennessee is depicted as a deeply male dominated society where women are marginalized, subordinated and objectified—an aspect that permeates McCarthy’s literary canon. This is specifically underlined in McCarthy’s description of a girl Harrogate observes standing by a window—“The girl looked down from her glass cage like a cat” (120)—an image echoed by the depictions of female containment in *The Border Trilogy*

where a woman is “frozen” in a window glass (Sullivan, *Boys will be Boys* 230). While the girl in *Suttree* is imprisoned and domesticated like some house pet, other women are reduced to the role of domestic servants. Reese yells to his wife: “Where’s that coffee at, woman?” (373) and Suttree’s friend, Ab Jones, commands his wife: “Bring this man a beer” (246). Doll Jones becomes the novel’s central figure of female oppression and subordination. The very name Doll has an offensive and inanimate ring to it, a name which implies that she is ornamental—hinting at men’s belittling view of women. But she is portrayed as a hard worker, singlehandedly running their bar, and is depicted sympathetically. Further, her face is full of scars and she lacks one eye—emphasizing her suffering. Although Abednego Jones is oppressed by a racist society, she is the real victim.

Degradation of women is not isolated to the rough neighborhoods of Knoxville. Women are controlled and infantilized by the men Suttree meets. The sheriff exclaims: “I will say one thing: you’ve opened my eyes. I’ve got two daughters, oldest fourteen, and I’d see them both in hell fore I’d send them up to that university” (190). Knowledge can be a pathway to awareness and opposition, therefore the sheriff wants to keep his daughters within the constraints of the family institution. Female sexuality is seen as threatening and needs to be kept pure and untainted. Likewise, a used car salesman talking to Suttree tells him he contemplates shooting thieves that have been stealing from him. “Hell, they’re just kids,” Suttree objects. “Might as well shoot them now. Fore they get any bigger ... Just like girls, he said. They grow up and hit in along about thirteen or fourteen and they’s a few of em start screwin everybody in town. That’s ye whores” (320, 321). The contempt for promiscuous girls and hookers is vicious. Sexism is prevalent, which allows men to be sexual but denies women the same privilege. They are to be married “safely” into a monogamous relationship and into the chaste roles of mothers and wives. But McCarthy refuses to portray women as only pure and beautiful, disclosing details of bodily discharge: “Through the fog Suttree was

presented with a bony pointed rump. She pissed loudly into the river and rose and went in again” (370). Instead of gracefully squatting behind a bush, her backside is almost erect like a male sex organ, mimicking men’s way of urinating. The lower-class seems to present a different set of gendered norms, unmasking the “lady-like”-conventions of the upper class.

Just about every male Suttree interacts with utters something demeaning about women, reducing them to sexual objects. Sometimes, Suttree gently makes fun of some of these pretences, correcting Willard’s phrasing which suggests that women are men’s property: “‘You got a girl?’ ‘No. I used to have one but I forgot where I laid her’” (388). But other times, the objectification of women takes on a more sinister tone when women become reduced to mere sex objects. His employer suggests they visit a brothel and says to Suttree: “We go up there, Sut, we’ll run a pair down and put the dick to em” (401). The imagery is deliberately provoking and offensive, marking Suttree’s environment as misogynistic. Suttree uncritically accepts it, replying: “I’m for that”. But when confronted with its manifestations, he reacts with sadness:

A garrulous jocko was miming buggery behind a young black girl passing on the walk and she turned on him with hot eyes and he fled laughing. The gallery of indolents draped among trashcans and curbstones pointed and croaked. Give it to you mammy, she told them, and the black mummer mimed masturbation at her, two hands holding an imagined phallus the size of a lightpole while the watchers hooted and slapped their knees. To Suttree they appeared more sinister and their acts a withershins allegory of anger and despair... (299)

He is witnessing the symptoms of a society which oppresses women and instinctively reacts to it. The tone is melancholic with undertones of anger with men who are described as a

“gallery of indolents.” Suttree notes that the men’s frustration and social problems are the reason they ridicule the woman. Moreover, the imagined oversized phallus symbolizes what they lack, which is the power implemented in the symbol. By being emasculated by society, they try to rectify personal authority by harassing others. It illustrates the condemnation Suttree receives from his father where he claims that the “street if full of the helpless and the impotent” (15). But Suttree does not stand up for the oppressed and offended woman. Although disillusioned and angered by the scene, the protagonist is unwilling to confront the men’s behavior and instead silently accepts it: “Some knew him to nod to and nodded but the hand he raised to greet them with seemed held in a gesture of dread” (299). Suttree realizes that McAnally has its own power hierarchy which subordinates and oppresses others.

Suttree journeys further away from hegemonic masculinity and is drawn to the marginalized. The moment that marks a change in his consciousness is the solitary trip to the forest where “[s]ome doublegoer, some othersuttree elude[s] him in [the] woods” (346). The woods become a site of epiphany as every place he arrives at seems to have just been abandoned by the othersuttree. Suttree has an uncanny realization that he is merely following a set path, the norms of society, the othersuttree being the Suttree of his father’s world: the identity that he tries to escape from. His travel through the forest becomes a metaphor for gaining insight. He fears that catching up with his doublegoer would cause him to be “neither mended nor made whole but rather set mindless to dodder drooling with his ghostly clone from sun to sun across a hostile hemisphere forever” (346). Suttree fears that he will be trapped within the system of his father, as much as he fears compromising himself in order to lead a comfortable life. The forest is not a site of masculine reassertion, but represents the feminine body as he sees “a blueback foetus” and parts of trees looks like “mammary” (343). He sheds the mask of invulnerability and cries violently, lying on the ground “sucking his bones,” alluding to a child sucking his thumb. In a Whitman-esque depiction, he becomes one with the

landscape, “hear[ing] the grass [kneel] in the wind” (347). The forest reveals his need to connect with the feminine and becomes a safe haven from the father and the impinging gender norms, as he feels that “everything had fallen from him” (345).

Mother She gives Suttree a concoction which provides him with his gendered epiphany and marks his move away from the oppressive masculine sub-hegemony of McAnally, to which I will return shortly. Suttree seeks other places and other identities. He is not comfortable in the oppressive hegemony since it is too similar to his father’s world. He moves away from the violent masculinity and toward the oppressed. In the end, Suttree has completely distanced himself from his former environment, reading about his dead male friends in the paper in what he calls “A season of death and epidemic violence” (501), looking at their pictures, reading their real names different from their identity-concealing masculine aliases. “Hoghead was dead in the paper ... His name was James Henry. In the old photo he appeared childlike and puckish ... (485). Most of them are victims of their own violent impulses. Their rage at being subordinated is manifested in subordinating others, creating a destructive spiraling effect. Suttre himself sees it as a manifestation of anger and despair, and upholds his sympathy with them even as he breaks out of the sub-hegemony.

The Homosexual Taboo: Queer elements in *Suttree*

[I]t would appear that that the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo ... [T]he dispositions that Freud assumes to be primary or constitutive facts of sexual life are effects of a law which, internalized, produces and regulates discrete gender identity and heterosexuality. (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 87)

At surface level, *Suttree* is about a heterosexual man failing in his romantic relationships to women because of his difficult relationship with his mother. But looking closer at McCarthy's use of symbolism and delving deeper into the psyche of the main character, there are prominent features of sexual doubt and gender instability. The ambivalence of the female body features prominently in the text. Gaping vaginas and shriveled breasts are contrasted with soft pleasing breasts, signaling the limits of heterosexuality and its fictitious appearance as a coherent unit. Implemented in *Suttree* is a fear of homosexuality, an intimidating taboo hinting at a forbidden sexuality: "At a table in the rear a group of dubious gender watched them with soulful eyes ... Suttree looked away from their hot eyes" (86). He sees them as inhabiting "dubious gender," something frightening and even threatening. He has to avert his eyes from their sexual glances in fear of arousal and of discovering repressed impulses. In another instance, a man named Jake tries to kiss him to which he replies: "Get away you ass" (362). Suttree needs to overcome the fear of homosexuality in order to fully integrate into Knoxville, a city which is described as a "Gomorrah" (288). Symbolically, the first instance of Suttree's split self happens on "Gay Street": "On Gay Street the traffic lights are stilled ... He marches darkly towards his darkly matching shape in the glass of the depot door. His fetch come up from life's other side like an autoscopic hallucination, Suttree and Antisuttree, hand reaching to the hand" (33). His reflection does not correspond to his internal sense of self and seems to allude to his gendered two-ness. The internal self is complex and liminal, the external singular and bodily fixed as male. Further, Suttree's heart is physically inverted, situated on the right side, possibly suggesting that Suttree is an "invert" or that his heart lies with the inverts. This somewhat dated term which refers to homosexual or transgendered persons is a designation that McCarthy uses to describe the sexuality of some of the characters in the book. Therefore, it can be inferred that Suttree's instability seems connected to the fear of homosexuality. Under the influence of Mother She's drug, Suttree has a childhood

recollection of watching boys bathe naked: “He saw the blood in his eyelids where he lay in a field in a summer noon and he saw young boys in a pond, pale nates and small bald cods shriveled with the cold” (514). McCarthy focuses on their naked buttocks and testicles in what could be read as homoerotic memories coming to the fore. Suttree’s unfiltered, unrepressed consciousness has emerged, depicting a buried sexuality.

In his near-death hallucinations, Suttree is confronted by the patriarchal catholic deity that condemns him for his sins. He imagines a scenario of queers and prostitutes arguing and exclaims: “Foul perverts one and sundry. Silkbedizen pizzlelickers. Roaming the world. Slaking their hideous gorges with jissom. Oh, I shall be loath to tell. I’ll bewray the tribe of them to the high almighty God who ledgers up our deeds in a leatherbound daybook. With marbled endpapers, I am told” (551). He adapts an ironic voice, ridiculing the crazy reverend and the condemning church. The description of God possessing a daybook with marbled endpapers is deliberately comical and reflects Suttree’s view of the church as “[g]rim and tireless in their orthopedic moralizing” (309). The gay taboo is obvious: Prostitutes and gays are perverts because they are “pizzlelickers” or penis lickers. Suttree is coming to terms with the homosexual taboo, as well as the church’s condemnation of promiscuous women—the imposed moralism from the patriarchal God. He is awoken by a catholic priest anointing him as he is supposedly dying. Suttree feels “like a rapevictim” (555)—an indication of his identification with the oppressed, the prostitutes and the women. He demeans the priest and has a vision of the patriarchal God opening up the gates of Hades and letting all the sinners out (552). After this episode, he learns that he is “one Suttree and one Suttree only” (557). He has finally come to terms with and rejected the catholic God of his childhood. As a consequence of this, the marginalized and outcasts of Knoxville are in his view no longer condemned. He has freed himself from the moralizing patriarch and is ready to embrace the “sinners.” He learns that he is like them and that every man is one man.

Suttree's insight leads to a final heart warm farewell with the transgendered character Trippin through the Dew. Jessica Simmons points out that he is also a liminal figure operating between genders and "their relationship forces Suttree to confront the fiction and fluidity of gender" (56). Suttree asks Trippin about his transgendered friend Sweet Evenin' Breeze, referring to him as "You or her. Him. It" (496). Furthermore, Simmons argues that both Trippin and Sweet Evenin' Breeze's gendered in-betweenness is confusing to Suttree. She points out that he calls Trippin, instead of the correct "she," simply "John"—his birth name (Simmons 56). But by using the word "correct," Simmons tries to fix the character in one category whereas McCarthy aesthetically underlines the blurred gender of Trippin, alternately referring to him with male and female pronouns. He/she is textually bi-gendered, subverting and challenging sexed categorizations. Trippin becomes a figure which ultimately makes Suttree reconsider his own gender identity and marks his movement beyond the imposed taboos and prejudices. At the end of the novel, a tender moment develops between the two:

'Well I see you're still around anyway,' said Suttree. 'Honey I'm always here. They can't do without me.' He smiled, primly and coyly... 'Where you been?' he said. 'I was in the hospital. Typhoid fever ...' 'Let me see you.' He turned Suttree toward the streetlamp and peered into his eyes with genuine solicitude ... Suttree held out his hand. 'Tell me goodbye,' he said. 'Where you goin?' 'I don't know. I'm leaving Knoxville ... Right now. I'm gone.' The black reached out sadly, his face pinched. They stood there holding hands in the middle of the little street. 'When you comin back?' 'I don't guess I'll be back.' 'Don't tell me that.' 'Well sometime maybe. Take care.' 'Honey you write and let me know how you gettin on.' (564, 565)

Their farewell is depicted almost as a love scene; a beautiful rendering of human warmth and love which indicates that Suttree has developed as a character. No longer does he fear the “dubious genders,” he does not avert his eyes, but engages in physical contact giving a loving goodbye to a soul akin to his. Jessica Simmons suggests that Trippin is a double to Suttree since they both “staunchly resist societal conformity” (57). Maybe there is even more to their relationship than a mutual resistance of conventionality. McCarthy seems to draw attention to what Judith Halberstam calls a “queer time and space” which is in “opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality and reproduction” (1). Queerness becomes not only a “sexual identity” but a value system and a way of life outside of the larger community (Halberstam 1). *Suttree* seems to share similar values and thus warns of the oppressive structures of hegemonic culture and heteronormativity. McCarthy’s depiction of the flight from the hegemonic seems to highlight Halberstam’s philosophy on subcultures: “Subcultures provide a vital critique of the seemingly organic nature of ‘community’ and they make visible the forms of unbelonging and disconnection that are necessary to the creation of community” (Halberstam 153). Queer time refers to a rejection of the “conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood” (152). Queer time can be thought of as a subversion of the ideology of the *Bildungsroman*, where the protagonist must mature and “grow up.” Instead, insight for Suttree seems to lie in the rejection of growing up and becoming a responsible family man, suggesting an embracement of queer time.

Trippin becomes the last feminine figure in Suttree’s environment and marks his final farewell to Knoxville. The image of them “holding hands in the middle of the street” (564) becomes an indication that Suttree has finally merged with the previously perceived other. The other is not “othered” anymore but has become “the same”—he has connected with his Anti-Suttree and transgressed the fear of homosexuality: “Suttree by the window watched the

frosted glass ... The junkman drunk, his mouth working mutely and his neck awry like a hanged man's. A young homosexual alone in the corner crying. Suttree among others, sad children of the fates whose home is the world, all gathered here a little while to forestall the going there" (464). He is among the others, a part of the outcasts and the oppressed, but more importantly, he has embraced the marginalized.

Chapter Four: The Mother—and the Fear of Gender Transgression

Having examined both Suttree's grapple with gender identity and the function of the father, this chapter will address what I identify as the most central figure in the text: the mother. As noted before, Suttree's mother propels the protagonist towards a deeper understanding of the world and his identity. But identifying with the mother reveals Suttree's fears of his own gender inadequacy. In the slums of Knoxville, he encounters Mother She whose potions engenders insight by bringing to the fore his sexual fears and gender issues he must confront in order to psychologically reconnect with his biological mother. McCarthy stages a symbolic metamorphosis whereby Suttree obtains female attributes in his psychological reunion with her. This chapter will argue how the text presents the Catholic Church as androcentric and uses the subversive figure of Mother She in order to critique it. Moreover, it will argue how psychoanalyst Melanie Klein's object-relations theory can clarify the main protagonist's conflicted maternal relationship, as well as shed light on McCarthy's literary technique of staging his mental struggle.

Overcoming the Androcentric Philosophy of the Catholic Church

The novel explores the corruptive and immersive power of the father and how it is embedded in institutions such as the family and the church. The main protagonist has been brought up Catholic but rejects the ideology because it is "filled with tales of sin and unrepentant deaths and visions of hell ... and dogmas of Semitic Damnation" (309). The catholic institution is represented by a bearded father-deity—a metaphor for the church's androcentric ideology. When seeking refuge in a church, Suttree studies a painting of Christ: "To the left his mother, Mater alchimia in skyblue robes, she treads a snake with her chipped and naked feet" (307). The image of the mother stepping on a snake indicates the catholic view of women as the cause of the original sin and is symbolic of their vilification in phallogentric religions. It

alludes to Eve's transgression in the garden of Eden, to which God declared: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ... Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow thou shalt bring forth children and thy desire shall be with your husband, and he shall rule over thee" (*Holy Bible*, Gen. 3:15,16). Thus, the image symbolizes the woman's subordination to the spouse through matrimony and exposes the Catholic Institution as built upon a dislike of women. Suttree, like Eve, has transgressed and broken the law of the Father; herein lies the symbolic connection between him and Grace. Moreover, the duality of the evil snake juxtaposed with the glorified "mother of all things" indicates the protagonist's central ambiguity with regard to the mother since she is both idealized and feared. The text plays on the Christian binary, depicting two different mothers with different connotations. When hit in the head with a floor polisher, Suttree expects to see the "Madonna of desire," but instead sees a "foul hag with naked gums" (227). Thus, there is a good and an evil mother: Grace, his biological mother, signaling purity, and the alternative mother of Knoxville, Mother She, who is "a black witch" (77) with "adder eyes" (340). The two figures stand for his conflicting feelings towards the maternal.

By way of free indirect discourse, Suttree's implication with the paradigm of the church is revealed when he likens women to Christian figures. For example when he attends his son's funeral, his wife becomes a "Madonna bereaved" (181), who "cried and sank to the ground and was lifted up and helped away wailing. Stabat Mater Dolorosa" (185). Stabat Mater Dolorosa refers to a hymn that recounts Virgin Mary's sorrows at the death of her son. The poetic description gives the impression that Suttree does not see her for what she really is: a mother torn asunder by the loss of her child. Instead, she is a figure and a symbol of purity. McCarthy's critics note a similar tendency in the depictions of Suttree's first girlfriend, Wanda: "[i]n Suttree's mode of perception, she seems mostly allegorical ... She seems more emblem than person, the dream of a perfect—and therefore lost or unattainable—passion"

(Young 117). The female characters are all accompanied by a degree of idealization and McCarthy thus highlights Suttree's alienation from these characters by depicting them as religious figures. Female alienation is epitomized by the description of the sounds Suttree hears while resting his head on Wanda's belly: "the hiss of meteorites through the blind stellar depths" (432). To him, she is a cosmic mystery and an otherworldly being. However, Joyce, in her embodiment of both the Madonna as well as Mary Magdalene, subverts the religious epitomes established by the text. Although she is a prostitute, Joyce is also a maternal character and her name echoes the name of Suttree's mother, Grace. Suttree's alienation from women is rooted in his lost mother. She is the original idealized female and lost love-object, estranged from the protagonist by his father.

A Lost Connection to the Mother

The text gives indications that Suttree has distanced himself from the mother, as if suggesting the protagonist's inability to connect with her. When looking at her picture, Suttree perceives her as "look[ing] out at the void" (153), which is McCarthy's way of signaling their psychological distance. Gazing at photographs is often used to reveal the character's mental relation to the subject in the picture. Therefore, the spectator sometimes imagines the photographic subject looking directly at him/her, which suggests contact. In *Suttree*, however, the mother does not look *at him*. In his eyes, she is looking at the empty space, the chasm which separates them. While he has moved into her lower-class world, she has abandoned it for a middle-class life. Moreover, the episode underlines his feelings of guilt because the only time in the novel he is able to look directly at her, is through the photograph at a safe distance. Their estranged relationship is also the focus of attention when the mother visits him in the workhouse:

Her [the mother's] lower chin began to dimple and quiver. 'Buddy,' she said.

'Buddy' ... But the son she addressed was hardly there at all. Numbly he watched himself fold his hands on the table. He heard his voice, remote, adrift. 'Please don't start crying,' he said. See the hand that nursed the serpent ... A thin gold ring set with diamonds. That raised the once child's heart of her to agonies of passion before I was...

Hot salt strangled him. (74, emphasis added)

The use of imperative commands the attention to her wedding ring. The ring is the symbol of her and his father's union—a closed circle which the protagonist cannot enter. Moreover, the ring suggests her implications with the Catholic Institution and her subordination by the authoritative husband. The protagonist's musings of her romantic past reveal incestuous undertones, hinting at latent jealousy and father-son rivalry as he envisions her desire for the father before he was born. The wording "*agonies of passion*" is ambiguous in that it possibly indicates a high degree of passion but also carries connotations to sorrow and pain. Physically unable to speak to her and choked by his own tears, Suttree gets up and walks away. He is "hardly there at all" underlines the protagonist's disconnectedness from the situation; when in addition, he "watches himself fold his hands," the text appears to suggest that he is not in control of his own body. The mother is trying to communicate with him, but he shuts her out. His feelings of guilt are drawn to the fore by another sentence in the imperative: "See the mother sorrowing. How everything that I was warned of's come to pass" (74). Whose voice we hear in the last sentence is unclear. It may be that the text projects the voice of the mother, but most likely this is Suttree imagining what she is thinking (Canfield 668). Luce reads the mother's grief as "unman[ning] him with shame" (238). While Suttree leaves the mother in order to avoid crying, as I discussed in Chapter Three, there is another reason for his wordless flight, in that crying becomes a trope for their inability to communicate. Both the protagonist

and his mother cannot get themselves to utter their words, obstructed by their mutual sorrow over the other's situation. In addition, they are worlds apart, occupying different social spheres. Melanie Klein's theory relating to maternal separation seems pertinent because it addresses issues of guilt, anxiety and the psychological mechanism of projecting good and bad qualities into parts of the body belonging to loved ones. Suttree's situation involves feelings of guilt because he has abandoned her. She is lost to him and the only way to repair their relationship is by conforming to a middle-class lifestyle, which he does not want to do. His longing for her nearness manifests itself in fantasies in which he is returned to a pre-oedipal space—a utopian scenario before the father came between them.

Suttree tries to spiritually reconnect with his mother. He visits his maternal aunt to examine old family albums. As opposed to the dead and deserted house of the father, his mother's family house is filled with warmth. He feels a belonging to this house, studying the photo album as if to confirm his kinship with the mother. The house metaphor discloses where Suttree's "home" is and his identity lies. A conversation with his aunt reveals that Suttree's relationship to his mother used to be one of closeness: "Lord you were such a[n] angel your mother wished she had all boys'. Suttree's spine convulsed in a long cold shunting of the vertebrae" (154). His aunt's words make Suttree shudder. He used to belong to her, to be "her angel," but in his repudiation of his father he has also removed himself from her. Moreover, angel carries connotations of feminization which presents a threat to his masculinity.

The Mother's Body as a Site of the Grotesque and the Beautiful

The inner world consists of objects, first of all the mother, internalized in various aspects and emotional situations. The relationships between these internalized figures and between them and the ego, tend to be experienced—when persecutory anxiety is dominant—as mainly hostile and dangerous; they are felt to be loving and good when the infant is gratified and happy feelings prevail. (Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* 141)

McCarthy's use of free indirect discourse takes on a Kleinian dimension as he invests objects with parts of the mother's body in order to express the protagonist's psychological relationship to her. In the course of Suttree's formative journey, he envisions parts of her body in both a grotesque and pleasing fashion. A flayed turtle becomes a "wet grey foetal mass" (284), and in the forest where he experiences his epiphany, he sees trees with fungi that are metaphorically described as "flangeous mammary growths with a visceral consistency" (343). His ambivalence with regard to both separation and identification is expressed through these projections as his quest to be reconciled with his mother progresses. McCarthy's use of metaphors makes it clear that at the center of his protagonist's problems lies a repressed maternal conflict which repeatedly floats to the surface, just like the trash and debris that surface outside Suttree's houseboat.

In addition to his projection of the maternal body onto objects, he introjects objects, investing them with good or threatening qualities which are expressed through the use of adjectives. Thus, when Suttree is in a romantic relationship or when he is treated by nurses after his several injuries, breasts are associated with pleasure: "A soft young breast crossed his nape," (376) "Her soft breast against his elbow ..." (230). However, when he is depressed and lonely, he observes "dead breasts" and "shriveled leather teats like empty purses hanging" (551, 513). The soft and young are contrasted with the shriveled and dead, marking the

mother's body as a site where life and the dread of extinction meet. The nurses, Wanda and Joyce seem to function as mother substitutes—symbolic for his need to be reunited with his mother. For example, when with Joyce, the bed is described as a womb (483). Although the womb signals comfort, it also entails isolation and solitude. He feels “slowly anesthetized” (488) and muses: “Her soft breast against his arm. Why then this loneliness?” (492). Mother-substitutes are not enough for Suttree who needs Grace. But to be united with her also entails reconciliation with her bad counterpart, the persecuting mother who threatens to void him with her genitals (542).

Douglas J. Canfield has a different reading of the function of the mother. He identifies “the devouring mother” after Julia Kristeva's concept of the mother as abject. He notes that “In patriarchal, patrilineal societies, men define themselves, their genealogical identity, *against* this [the archaic mother's generative power]” (677). Although Canfield highlights important aspects of the novel since McAnally is full of the abject, such as sewage, dead bodies and filth, the Kristevan concept is only partially helpful in exploring the meaning of the mother and her body. What Canfield views as Suttree's need to dissociate from the mother, seems to run counter to the narrative logic of the novel and to my reading of it thus far. Kristeva sees the abject as pre-linguistic pre-objects, revealing a primal fear of the maternal body (Kristeva *Powers of Horror* 1, 11). At the center of her theory is the notion of the mother's body as the primary abject expressed by a devouring mother—a horrific authority that threatens the subject's feeling of autonomy. Both Klein and Kristeva focus on what the latter identifies as the importance of “the lost prenatal unity with the mother” (*Envy and Gratitude* 179)—a pre-linguistic state of oneness. But, while Kristeva's theory adopts a singular view of the mother as an embodiment of horror and chaos, Klein's theory sees her as a site of ambivalence. Klein's concepts thus open up for a duality which more closely captures McCarthy's way of describing Suttree's fears. This difference may be more clearly

understood if we think of Kristeva's abject as the Kleinian "paranoid-schizoid position" in which "the main anxiety is that the ego will be destroyed by the bad object [or in this case the abject]" (Segal 69). What is portrayed in the novel, however, seems to correlate with Klein's depressive position in which "anxieties spring from ambivalence, and the child's main anxiety is that his own destructive impulses have destroyed or will destroy, the object that he loves..." (Segal 69). Klein's concept better grasps the internal battle between the bad and the good mother of the text. Admittedly, the episode in which Suttree sees himself devoured by female genitalia does seem to illustrate Kristeva's understanding of the abject, but only as an isolated episode. I propose that Kleinian concepts are more adept to get to the full complexities of the maternal-issue.

Canfield's reading excludes aspects where the mother's body is seen as pleasing, or even comforting. In other words, she is not only a site of horror but of comfort and goodness. She symbolizes both Suttree's fear of feminization but also his metaphorical salvation—a paradoxical wish of wanting to be close to the mother despite the fear of being engulfed by her. Klein integrates a dualism in the concept of the mother which she roots in libidinal impulses and the death drive. This duality formulates the main aspect of Suttree's journey—his flight from death signaled by the lifeless church of his father and the mother who stands for both death and birth. Kristeva's theory also presupposes that the subject desires inclusion into civilization by disassociation with the mother: "He [the subject] has not achieved the separation of identity provided by access to the symbolic and imaginary forms of existence, ruled by paternity" (MacCannel 73). This aspect of her theory diverges from the ideology of the novel which rejects the paternal figure and signals a trajectory which relies on identification *with* the mother. Suttree moves away from society and its imposing structures, and thus also away from the father. Canfield reads *Suttree* as a narrative of escaping the phallic mother in order to preserve a "patriarchal, patrilineal system," declaring "McCarthy's

world ... very male” (682). But unlike many novels which address similar issues,⁹ McCarthy grounds the universe in a gynocentric cosmology symbolized by the figure of Mother She. McCarthy’s novel rejects the oppressive father and seeks to validate subcultural practices which opposes the hegemonic. He places the mother at the center of subject formation and sees her as a primary symbol for the oppressed and rejected in Western culture. Therefore, although the novel is written from the male perspective, he reveals that the world men inhabit is nonetheless centered on women. His main character does not idealize the father and instead searches for a community with “all souls” (553). As the philosophy of the text reveals, mothers are the very epicenter of life and death.

The Epiphanic Figure of Mother She

Being described as “Much like a priest with his deathbed kit” and the fact that she does not appear in photographs (509, 337), Mother She could be understood as a deity figure excluded from culture. Walsh suggests that it is “hegemonic culture’s loss for shunning Mother She and demonizing the access to mystical knowledge she possesses” (247). It is clear that McCarthy depicts the catholic father-deity as a false God—a moralizing oppressor preaching a hypocritical gospel. Mother She, on the other hand, seems to be a “true” deity who embraces all people and who does not propagate narrow virtues of purity and goodness and, with her decaying body, she is the sober reflection of material death. In addition, the character alludes to the gender issues presented in the text. The Catholic Church propagates a strict gender ideology with female and male archetypes, whereas Mother She’s “androgynous silhouette”

⁹ For example in her Kristevan analysis of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s dramatic works, Susan E. Gustafson notes that “The mother is excluded from the patriarchal symbolic order. Her role in subject and culture formation is suppressed” (120). In Lessing’s work, the mother is also seen as a horror object, rendered strictly with abject qualities of “incompleteness, pain and ugliness” whereas the father is imbued with “admiration, completeness, pleasure and beauty” (120).

(512) suggests gender fluidity. She is also a figure who gives the protagonist insight into *his* androgynous self. Hence, there seems to be a link between Mother She and another androgynous character, Trippin Through The Dew, because after his encounter with Mother She, Suttree feels a strong sense of connection to and a renewed understanding of Trippin. She functions as an ideological gateway into the subcultures which Suttree wishes to understand and gain access to.

Mother She is a key character in *Suttree* because she brings insight and enables the protagonist to explore his repressed sexual fears and the fear of gender transgression which he must overcome in order to accept his split self. There are three occurrences of epiphany and all three seem to involve the mystical crone. Suttree's first meeting with Mother She, in which she indicates knowledge of his future, is followed by his epiphanic journey through the forest. Her "adder eyes" (340) seem to be mirrored in the snake Suttree spots while entering the forest (342), which marks her presence and influence on his journey. In their second meeting, she gives him a concoction which gives him visions of his childhood and gain insight into his sexuality. Moreover, her brew may have triggered his illness—the third moment of epiphany in which he finally merges with the mother and rejects the father. The harsh "tasteless slime" makes Suttree feel "a shuddering sickness that brought his stomach up tight against his diaphragm" (511), which foreshadow his bleeding bowels when stricken with typhus. The "bad mother," Mother She, thus spawns true knowledge of Suttree's inner self, forcing him to face his fears of castration by sexually violating him:

Dead reek of aged female flesh, a stale aridity. Dry wattled nether lips hung from out the side of her torn stained drawers. Her thighs spread with a sound of rending ligaments, dry bones dragging in their sockets. Her shriveled cunt puckered open like a

mouth gawping. He flailed bonelessly in the grip of a ghastr black succubus, he screamed a dry and soundless scream. (514)

The gothic grotesqueness of the episode indicates a fear of the mother and of her genitals. The scene is rendered ambiguous: Suttree drank her potion, but is he hallucinating or is she raping him? Rape is usually depicted as done by men, but McCarthy explores the fear of rape by a woman. Instead of the terror of being penetrated by a penis, female genitalia become a castrating mouth. It represents a void, and possibly the ambivalent space of life and death in the mother's womb. The womb is normally a symbol of birth, but becomes a space of both life and death because it brought out Suttree and his stillborn brother. Moreover, the womb also signals the lost maternal space of unity. However, the gruesome episode with Mother She does not entail Suttree's death but a renewed vitality. Her drink gives him insight which enables him to transgress his past self: "A door closed on all that had been" (513). And, when he return to his houseboat, he "rocked in the swells, floating like the first germ of life adrift on the earth's cooling seas, formless macule of plasm trapped in a vapor drop and all creation yet to come" (517). He has a sensation of being reborn and able to begin life anew as "all creation" is "yet to come"—a *tabula rasa* of the self.

As a crone, Mother She is marked by her inability to give birth. She is infertile and therefore a symbol of death. But she has other generative powers. Unable to give life, she manages to give birth to Suttree's identity by reconnecting him with his mother and by removing his fear of homosexuality and of death. The mother-figure becomes the main instigator for rebirth and identity.

The Sexed Transformation and Final Reconnection to the Mother

Suttree's journey has throughout the novel been aimed at identification with the mother, symbolically named Grace. He left his father's oppressive world in favor of his lower-class mother's social sphere, gradually moving away from the masculine hegemony towards the marginalized. The body of the mother has increasingly imposed itself on his psyche in ambiguous forms: both as threatening to his masculinity and as a pathway to redemption and connection to all people. In the novel's crescendo, Suttree is finally freed from the father and reconnected with his mother. The symbolic metamorphosis occurs when Suttree's typhoid fever sets off a fantasy-sequence leading to a final epiphanic moment.

The sequence is triggered when Suttree lies sick in his bed on his houseboat. He feels his "father's weight tilting the bed" (540), the weight on the bed signaling the psychological weight of his oppressive influence. In her reading of *The Border Trilogy*, Nell Sullivan has identified a tendency in McCarthy to depict scenes of male menstruation (237) and reads the title *The Crossing* as a "reference to his 'gender crossing'" (233). In the light of her insights, there is a similar occurrence in *Suttree*. In his sickness he "bleed[s] out of his ass" (544) which the image details as "a crimson stain ... spreading about Suttree's pale and naked haunches" (544). As in *The Crossing*, McCarthy's male character undergoes a bodily transformation adopting physical traits of the woman's body. Suttree exclaims in panic: "Who is this otherbody? I am no otherbody" (542). His fear of feminization is metaphorically depicted as his body changes through illness and there is no longer a clear division between himself and a woman. In addition, McCarthy mirrors his central character in female figures, highlighting his sex-transfiguration. He wakes up and "fann[es] his belly with the skirt of his gown" (553), with which McCarthy describes the hospital gown as a "skirt." This act is echoed by a mother-to-be washing her pregnant belly in his dreams (554), creating a symbolical parallel between Suttree and the mother.

But before arriving at this serene moment, he has been confronted by the bad mother. He sees “his Medusa beckon[ing]” and “l[ies] in a sexual nightmare” as he is confronted with a horrific depiction of female genitalia: “a withered brown pig’s eye crusted shut and hung with blue and swollen lobes. A white gruel welled” (542). The medusa represents his mother or her threatening counterpart. As previously mentioned, Suttree observes a painting of Mother Mary treading a snake, alluding to the snake-hair of the medusa. Moreover, in a childhood memory Suttree observes his mother crying, described as “a gorgon’s mask of grief” (155). In Greek mythology, Gorgon is another name for Medusa. It is therefore reasonable to read the scene as incestuous and a furthering of the metaphysical merging with the mother. The “horrifying decapitated head of the Medusa” suggests “a terror of castration linked to the sight of something ... the female genitals, probably those of an adult, surrounded by hair” (Freud 212). Moreover, she is “unapproachable and repels all sexual desires—since she displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother” (Freud 213). Freud’s reading of the Medusa figure displaying the genitals of the mother seems to be present in the text when Suttree sees the Medusa as a “gross dancer with a sallow puckered belly, hands cupping a pudendum grown with mossgreen hair, a virid merkin out of which her wet mauve petals smiled and bared from hiding little rows of rubber teeth like the serried jaws of conchshells” (542). Her hands “cups a pudendum,” which is a Latin term for the vulva, and “merkin” may describe an “artificial covering hair for the female pubic region” or “an artificial vagina” (“merkin”). The inauthenticity of her genitals may indicate that this is a “false mother” and not his Grace. Her genitals are depicted as smiling, turning into a mouth with threatening teeth; a clear indication of castration anxiety or what Canfield calls “mother-castration” (677). But because of the harmless material of the teeth, they add an ambiguity to the depiction which represents the protagonist’s first sign of overcoming the fear of castration.

The protagonist is surrounded by another gaping vagina: “He was being voided by an enormous livercolored cunt with prehensile lips that pumped softly like some levantine bivalve” (546). He re-enters his mother’s body, which symbolizes his psychological reunion with her, and this time the vagina lacks the threatening teeth. The depiction is not horrific anymore and instead the soft pumping seems tranquil, almost like the beating of a heart perceived from inside the womb. The re-entering of the mother triggers a scenario where the “archetypal patriarch” accuses him of being a sinner” (551), placing Suttree on a fantasy trial where he is prosecuted for immoral behavior and for keeping company with the people of the lower classes: “Mr. Suttree it is our understanding that ... contrary to conduct befitting a person of your station you betook yourself to various low places within the shire of McAnally and there did squander several ensuing years in the company of thieves, derelicts ... whores, trulls, brigands ...” (551). He is subjected to his father’s realm, the court, and is reprimanded for transgressing his “law.”

He is freed when he hears his birth name, Cornelius, mentioned for the first time in the novel: “Cornelius you come away from here this minute” (551), which is followed by the “archetypal patriarch himself unlocking the gates of Hades” (552), freeing all the sinners “into the universe” (552). It seems plausible that he hears his mother’s voice calling him and that his first name proper signals a renewed identity, suggesting that he has transgressed his previous names and aliases. He has cast off the father and his family name and has simply become Cornelius. His mother posits an escape from the father and only by merging with her is he able to shed the father’s condemning voice. He awakens with an orgasm when his “penis rose enormous from between his legs, a delicious spasm and there unfolded from the end of it a little colored flag on a wooden stem, who knows what country?” (552). His erection becomes a key moment because he learns that he can still be aroused, even after his maternal identification. Furthermore, he has it counters his father’s claim that the streets are only

composed of the helpless and the impotent. His penis, however, does not signify the phallic symbol—one of power—but is a symbol of vitality and fecundity. Despite his identification with her, he has not been castrated.

After the incident, he is described as “floating like a vast medusa in tropic seas” (553) and the image of the angel, which previously was met with a fear of feminization, is now a positive aspect of identification as he happily exclaims: “I feel like an angel” (557). He has become one with his mother, the Medusa, and he has once again become her angel. At the end of the novel, he sees himself twinned in the eyes of a blue-eyed child but his split self no longer bothers him and the scene is told in a serene tone (567). He has come to terms with his sexual fears and offers his heart-warm farewell to the transgendered character Trippin Through The Dew, which is a sign of Suttree’s acceptance of his gendered two-ness as well as an indication of his connection with the marginalized.

He gains insight into life itself and has overcome his colorblindness—the trope of the binary, wondering: “what is the color of grief? Is it black as they say? And anger always red? The color of that sad shade of ennui called blue is blue but blue unlike the sky or sea, a bitter blue, ruetinged, discolored at the edges... *The color of this life is water*” (499, emphasis added). The last statement indicates the fluid nature of self and identity, which Suttree has learned and accepted. In addition, it solidifies the recurrent imagery of water: the sea, the river and shells—the metaphoric imagery of the mother’s genitals, which ties together as a philosophical essence of fluidity opposing societal conformity and rigidity. He also understands that “all souls are one” (553). He has rid himself of his father’s ideology and feels “...everything fall away from him. Until there is nothing left of him to shed. It was all gone. No trail, no track” (565). The “track” indicates that he can no longer be persecuted by the father. Suttree brings along only the “talisman of the simple human heart within him” (565). However, the utopian depiction is countered when, as the protagonist leaves Knoxville, he

observes: “an enormous lank hound [coming] out of the meadow ... sniffing at the spot where Suttree had stood. Somewhere in the gray wood by the river is the huntsman ... His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them” (568). The image of the “slaverous” hounds alludes to the entrapment of conformity, being controlled and supervised by the father. His final advice is to flee the father and his oppressive structures.

Some critics have noted that the end rings false in the context of the novel (Walsh, 249). The problem with McCarthy’s depiction is that he never allows proper insight into the marginalized of McAnally. By narrating the story through the limited point of view, the reader is not allowed much insight into other characters besides the protagonist. As a consequence, they seem to function more as a means to further the protagonist’s identity and self than as complex subjects with their own agency. Hence, our insight into the subcultures and subversive characters is limited through the eyes of Suttree. McCarthy’s strategy also categorically renders women as maternal in order to point out the main character’s mother complex, which strengthens the case that McCarthy is primarily interested in the psychology of men at the behest of female characters.

Nell Sullivan criticizes McCarthy’s female figures and notes that in *Suttree*, the author includes “the one-dimensional stereotypes witch, virgin or whore” (230). As this chapter has shown, McCarthy plays on Catholic stereotypes of the virgin (Mother Mary) and the whore (Mary Magdalene) in order to explore the protagonist’s involvement with Catholic ideology. However, the text also depicts how he transgresses it. Thus, Sullivan does not seem to take into consideration how the novel presents a “character who actually *changes*” (Ellis qtd. in Walsh 250). Furthermore, Joyce is not one-dimensional—her motherly attitude, masculine behavior and conflicted identity are some of the character’s complexities, and she ultimately can be read as a subversion of the Catholic figures. The witch is also more multifaceted than

Sullivan acknowledges, being both a frightening deathlike figure and a spiritual oracle that enables Suttree to become reborn and revitalized. The most problematic female character in the novel, however, is Wanda, Suttree's first love. She is submissive, sexual and remains a stereotype throughout. McCarthy textually underlines this when he describes her as "com[ing] pale and naked from the trees into the water *like some dream old prisoners harbor or sailors at sea*" (426, emphasis added). She is in effect a fantasy-figure. However, she is allegorical of the lost feminine. Killed in an avalanche in the novel's only *deus ex machina*, Wanda becomes a figure denied to Suttree by nature itself.

Why has the author chosen to narrate this story through the perspective of one character? Instead of telling the novel from a lower-class or marginalized character's point of view, McCarthy has chosen to posit a critique from within hegemony by showing what ordeals a white man from a middle-class Catholic background must encounter in order to reject his father's ideology. Thus, the primary theme of *Suttree* is the rejection of the hegemonic but also the problems involved in discarding such an ideology. The text reveals how power is incorporated in gender and sexuality, as well as the psychological "laws" that have to be broken in order to identify with the excluded. The novel does not feature the stoic and composed men of his *Border Trilogy*, but a man ridden with fear and anxiety in what is a complex exploration of masculine identity. In this sense, *Suttree* is McCarthy's most daring depiction of gender and its instability.

Conclusion

Cormac McCarthy's focus on masculinity and masculine identities in *Suttree* reveals an underlying criticism of the normative demands of culture. The text highlights the reproduction of power through gender conformism—an aspect which upholds hegemonic masculinity—in a critique of 1950s American values. The novel dramatizes the unwanted aspects of gender through the protagonist's conflict with the figures of the haunting father and the patriarchal deity of the Catholic Church. The oppressive ideology of the father causes the main character to embark on a journey toward insight in what the thesis has identified as similar to a *Bildungsroman*. Suttree's quest is instigated by the mother who has been excluded by culture but is textually reinstated as a key element in the formation of identity. The author, thus, subverts Freud's father-centered Oedipus complex by casting the mother in the lead role and by depicting her as an active participant in male gender-development. She becomes the only route of escape from the "father-dominated" world which concurs with McGilchrist's insight with regard to *The Border Trilogy*, namely that "redemption comes from the feminine" (213). McCarthy's focus on the masculine seems to correlate with his view of society as a father-dominated space and can be understood as an aesthetic reflection of the theme of the lost feminine or the lost mother. The protagonist's split self is thus symbolical of his gendered two-ness, and subsequently, enables him to find the anti-Suttree of his psyche—a trope for what has been othered by hegemonic culture.

This thesis has also argued that McCarthy's mother-depiction is more complex than Douglas Canfield's reading of the figure of the mother through Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject. In his view, the mother in *Suttree* is a threat to subject formation. However, as the my Kleinian reading has tried to demonstrate, she represents a space of ambivalence that needs to be overcome in order for identification to take place. Therefore, the threatening and pleasing breasts stand for the duality of and ambivalence to separation and closeness to the mother.

McCarthy aesthetically articulates this by depicting objects which take the shape of the mother's body. In the conclusion of the novel, Suttree symbolically re-enters his mother's womb which represents his merging with her. He is finally called by his first name, symbolic for transgressing the patrilineal family name. God's release of the sinners from hell is an important aspect of his newfound knowledge, where his lower-class friends and marginalized individuals no longer are condemned souls but are part of the overall community of humanity. Moreover, the subversive figure of Mother She presents a critique of androcentric culture and is a key element to the protagonist's insights in order to transgress the laws of the father. Her ambivalent qualities function both as a reminder of biological death as well as a generator to the protagonist's rebirth. By shifting the textual cosmos from the Holy Father to Mother She, McCarthy seems to hint at a repressed aspect of the world that is subjugated and dominated by imposed structures—the structures of the church and the father-dominated household. Instead of dramatizing an escape from feminization which many texts postulate, *Suttree* depicts a flight from masculine norms, overturning the myth of a true essence of manhood. The text, thus, creates a liminal character operating and negotiating between different identities in a search for belonging, which culminates in a sexed transformation into a female.

As this thesis focus on gender aspects of the text has shown, McCarthy's transgendered character seems to have more importance than previously given by other critics. Trippin Through The Dew defies any textual sexed labeling and is alternately referred to by the male and female pronoun. The text effectively destabilizes the concept of a unitary gendered self and underlines the similarities between the protagonist and Trippin. Therefore, he becomes Suttree's double and offers a resolution to the sexual panic present in the novel. He is, in his very embodiment, the ideological challenge to the rigid structures of hegemonic culture, unveiling the falsity behind the sexed concepts of man and woman. McCarthy's focus on subcultures and their exclusion reveals a critical attitude against hegemonic "communities"

like the Catholic Church, who with their puritanical preaching demands conformity at the price of disavowing alternative identities. A community with all souls is only possible by shedding the ideology of damnation—an important insight for the protagonist.

McCarthy operates in a provocative textual space and often uses polemical strategies to get his points across. This can explain why he depicts misogynistic elements in his work, but as I argue in relation to *Suttree*, he ultimately subverts accusations of misogyny or at least complicates them. Admittedly, my approach has not properly investigated the feminine aspects of the novel, which are few. Therefore, it is important to note that a reading focused on depictions of femininity could both underline as well as contradict the claims in this thesis. However, I maintain that employing masculine concepts has engendered a reading which opens the text up beyond a simple definition of misogyny and, furthermore, has brought forth the text's explorations of gender blurring. Sullivan claims that the gender crossing in *The Border Trilogy* "create[s] a closed system of desire that effectively makes women unnecessary" (233). Thus, she concludes that McCarthy's persistent focus on male characters transgressing into the female realm is evidence of the author's hatred of women. However, I propose that exploring masculine gender subjectivity is an important artistic endeavor which should not be disenfranchised by a sexed colonialization of femininity. Rigid gender politics runs the risk of solidifying heteronormative power by criticizing depictions of male gender transgression as signs of the obviation of women. As we can infer from *Suttree*, McCarthy dramatizes the male fear of feminization and castration, although, ultimately gender transgression into the feminine becomes an act of liberation and salvation. Moreover, by focusing on masculinity and male subjects, McCarthy has posited a critique of hegemonic power from a male point of view.

Accusations of ridiculing and obviating women have also been directed at certain subcultural practices such as drag (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 187). The consequence of such

charges is that they reproduce sexed conformity and discredit practices that are articulations of different gender identities. Therefore, a queer perspective on gender is crucial because it focuses on the subversion of norms and lays bare the cultural power mechanisms which regulate and uphold strict rules of gendered conduct. A gender-approach to literature must be careful not to demand that artistic expressions must respect sexed categorizations, placing a barrier between masculinity and femininity as two separate fields of contestation. Would a text which reduces and ignores male characters be criticized for rendering men as unnecessary? And is not the exploration and critique of the masculine also an important part of the feminist project? McCarthy challenges the view that sex is a given of identity, instead drawing attention to its fluidity and the inherent fear of crossing into another gendered realm. I propose that these elements be examined without a normative demand of female representation. This is not to say that novels cannot be critiqued for ignoring women, but cannot be taken as a given that it therefore is an expression of misogyny.

This thesis has shown that there is more to McCarthy's gender politics than simply establish male authority by textually subjugating women. *Suttree* can be seen as a deconstruction of masculine identity as well as a questioning of its hegemonic position within Western culture. Investigating other novels by Cormac McCarthy through the lens of masculinity can be a fruitful endeavor which may reveal a profound insight into the author's artistic concerns. His early novel *Child of God* (1973), for example, also employs the trope of the lost mother. In the text, the protagonist Lester Ballard tries to violently recuperate his absent mother by killing women and kidnapping their bodies. He dresses them up, takes possession of them and, ultimately, acquires feminine attributes in another staging of gender transgression. McCarthy illustrates how Ballard dresses up in his victim's clothes, even wearing their scalps and hair in a provocative depiction of gender confusion. Such aspects are important in order to critically assess McCarthy's work as such gender issues are present in

most, if not all, of his novels. Moreover, the author's focus on the figures of the mother and father throughout his oeuvre deserves close examination as it is pivotal to his artistic vision. In *The Road*, for example, the lost mother leads to the father filling the role of both, in another questioning of gender as a sexed category as well as an exploration of masculinity.

It seems appropriate that *Trippin Through The Dew* should have the final words of this thesis:

A garish figure was coming along, a hoyden that sallied and fluttered through one cone of uncashiered lamplight down all Front Street. Trippin Through The Dew in harlequin evening wear ... 'Where's your hat this evening?' 'Oh honey hats are out. They just are. I always thought they were tacky anyway. Except mine of course.' He knit his hands and rolled his shoulders and a whinny of girlish laughter went skittering among the little gray shack and along the quiet twilit riverfront ... Trippin Through The Dew squeezed his hand and stepped back and gave a crazy little salute. Best luck in the world to you baby, he said. (565)

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Abstract

Den amerikanske forfatteren Cormac McCarthys mannsdominerte romaner har høstet kritikk for å utelate kvinner og det feminine i sin fiksjon. Denne oppgaven tar for seg en av forfatterens mindre kjente romaner, *Suttree* (1979), som omhandler en mann som velger å melde seg ut av storsamfunnet og flytter ned i slum-områdene i Knoxville, Tennessee. Det er en familiekonflikt som er grunnlaget for hans selvvalgte eksil, og teksten dramatiserer protagonistens konfliktfylte forhold til sine foreldre. Ved å undersøke romanen fra et maskulinitetsteoretisk perspektiv, stiller jeg følgende spørsmål: Er det slik at McCarthy ukritisk hyller maskulinitet og derfor undergraver femininitet, eller kan hans fiksjon sees på som en modig utforskning av mannlig kjønnsidentitet? Basert på innsikter fra queer teori, samt R.W. Connells teori om hegemonisk maskulinitet, akter jeg å foreta en kritisk lesning av *Suttree* fra et kjønnsperspektiv. I tillegg vil jeg se på hvordan boken omskriver Freuds Ødipus-kompleks ved å gi moren en større rolle i seksualitets- og kjønns-dannelse. Oppgaven undersøker om psykoanalytikerens Melanie Kleins teorier rundt forholdet mellom mor og barn kan åpne for en forståelse om morsfigurens rolle i McCarthy's verk. Oppgaven vil derfor veksle mellom maskulinitetsteori og psykoanalytiske konsept for å fange romanens kompleksiteter.